



SERVICE HISTORIES of ROYAL
NAVY WARSHIPS in WORLD WAR
2
by Lt Cdr Geoffrey B Mason RN (Rtd) (c)
2003

HMS RODNEY - Nelson-
class 16in gun Battleship
including Convoy Escort Movements

Editing & Additional Material by Mike Simmonds

HMS Rodney (Maritime Quest, [click to enlarge](#))

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HMS RODNEY was ordered from Cammell Laird, Birkenhead on 11 December 1922 and laid down on 28th December 1922. She was launched on 17th December 1925 by HRH The Princess Royal, as the 8th RN ship to carry this name, introduced in 1759. It had previously been used for an 1884 battleship, sold in 1909. This ship was fully commissioned at Devonport on 7th December 1927 for service in the Atlantic Fleet. During pre-war service she was refitted periodically but the planned full modernisation was not carried out because of the outbreak of WW2. She was the first RN battleship to be fitted with any radar and the second installation in the Fleet. Type 79Y for detection of aircraft was installed in 1938 and had been intended to go in her sister ship HMS NELSON. However this was changed because the chosen site for the radar aerial would have required the Admiral's flag to occupy an inferior position! After a successful WARSHIP WEEK National Savings Campaign in March 1942 this ship was adopted by the staff of Glynn Mills Bank in the City of London.

Battle Honours

QUEBEC 1759 - SYRIA 1840 - CRIMEA 1854 - NORWAY 1940 - ATLANTIC 1940-41 -
BISMARCK Action 1941 - MALTA CONVOYS 1941-42 - NORTH AFRICA 1942-43 - SICILY
1943 - SALERNO 1943 - MEDITERRANEAN 1943 - NORMANDY 1944 - ENGLISH CHANNEL
1944 - ARCTIC 1944

Heraldic Data

Badge: On a Field White, out of a ducal coronet Gold, an eagle
Purple with beak and claws, Gold.

Motto

Non Genarant Aquilae Columbas: 'Eagles do not breed doves'

Details of War Service

(for more ship information, go to [Naval History Homepage](#) and type name in Site Search

1939

August

31st – At 1800 hours the Home Fleet, comprising battleships NELSON (Flag CinC Home Fleet Admiral of the Fleet Sir Charles Forbes), RODNEY (Captain E N Syfret), ROYAL OAK and ROYAL SOVEREIGN, aircraft carrier ARK ROYAL (Flag Vice Admiral L V Wells, Vice Admiral Aircraft Carriers), light cruisers CALYPSO, CALEDON, DIOMEDE (Flying the broad pendant of Commodore E B C Dicken) and DRAGON of the 7CS, EFFINGHAM (Flag Vice Admiral Sir M K Horton, VA Northern Patrol), CARDIFF, DUNEDIN and EMERALD of the 12CS and AURORA (Flag Rear Admiral R H C Halifax, Rear Admiral D Home Fleet), BELFAST and SHEFFIELD of the 18CS, and destroyers FAULKNOR(D8), FAME, FEARLESS, FIREDRAKE, FORESTER, FORTUNE, FOXHOUND, FURY of the 8DF sailed from Scapa. The Fleet deployed to their war station in the northern North Sea between the Orkneys and Norway.

At 1900 hours the 1st BCS comprising HOOD (Flag Rear Admiral W J Whitworth, RA 1st BCS) and REPULSE escorted by the Tribal-class destroyers SOMALI (D6), ASHANTI, BEDOUIN, ESKIMO, MASHONA, and TARTAR of the 6th DF departed Scapa Flow to patrol with the Home Fleet in the northern North Sea. The intention of the CinC Home Fleet being to detach the battlecruisers to shadow any German forces met. BEDOUIN had mechanical defects and returned to Scapa Flow for repairs. At 2300 hours west of the Orkneys the 1st BCS joined the Home Fleet.

September

1st – At 1209 hours the CinC Home fleet received a signal from the Admiralty to the effect that a German force of one battlecruiser, two pocket battleships, one 8in cruiser and one 6in cruiser might be in Icelandic waters waiting for hostilities to commence before attacking the trade routes. The Home Fleet was ordered to proceed to the westward to prevent this German force carrying out its threat. The Home Fleet then turned west at 18 knots and passed through the Fair Isle Channel into the Atlantic.

2nd – During the day the screening destroyers commenced detaching to refuel. The requirement to refuel meant that until the Fleet returned to Scapa Flow destroyers were detaching and joining. At 2000 hours the fleet was in position 58-42N, 14-06W

3rd - At 0700 hours in position 58-15N, 20W the Home Fleet reversed course. At 1122 hours the CinC Home Fleet received a signal from the Admiralty to commence hostilities against Germany. At 1200 hours in approx position 59-05N, 18-20W the Home Fleet turned northerly to search for the German liner the SS BREMEN 51656 tons grt, that was known to be en route to Germany from New York. The destroyers were sent ahead in line abreast formation. At 1500 hours in position 63-20N, 16-35W, 32 miles off the coast of Iceland the destroyer SOMALI captured the German merchant ship the SS HANNAH BOGE 2372grt to become the first prize in the war at sea. At 1840 hours the CinC received a signal from the Admiralty reporting the German Fleet leaving Schillig Roads. At 1900 hours the Home Fleet turned eastward steering for the Fair Isle Channel. In the evening the destroyer ESKIMO experienced a turbine problem and detached to return to Scapa Flow. At 2300 hours the destroyer FAME was detached to go to the assistance of the liner the SS ATHENA that had been torpedoed in position 56-44N, 14-05W.

5th – At 0600 hours the Home Fleet entered the Fair Isle Channel. At 0800 hours the Fleet was in position – 59- 42N, 00-18W. After passing through the Fair Isle Channel the Home Fleet cruised to eastward of the Orkneys, most of the time in thick fog.

6th – At 0700 hours the Home Fleet arrived back at Scapa Flow.

7th – At 0600 hours the Home Fleet comprising battleships NELSON (Flag) and RODNEY, battlecruiser REPULSE, aircraft carrier ARK ROYAL, light cruisers AURORA, SHEFFIELD, and destroyers FAULKNOOR, FIREDRAKE, FORESIGHT, FORTUNE, FURY, ASHANTI, BEDOUIN, MASHONA, PUNJABI, SOMALI and TARTAR sailed from Scapa Flow to patrol off the Norwegian coast as far north as 63¹/₄N to intercept any German shipping returning to Germany and exercise contraband control. ASHANTI detached with turbine problems and went to Greenock.

(On 4/9/39 the Royal Air Force attacked Wilhelmshaven and Brunsbuttel, claiming hits on a German battleship in Schillig Roads and one lying alongside the mole at Brunsbuttel. On 7/9/39 the CinC Home Fleet received a message [timed 1113 hours] from the Admiralty saying that the enemy had concentrated a force of 800 long-distance bombers in the North West of Germany and it was considered that these might be used against the fleet, and that, as Scapa was practically defenceless against air attack, it was considered advisable that a base on the west coast of Scotland should be prepared. Of the available anchorages the CinC selected Loch Ewe; and the netlayer GUARDIAN was sent to lay indicator nets there)

10th – At 1815 hours the Home Fleet arrived back at Scapa Flow.

14th – At 2030 hours RODNEY, battlecruiser HOOD, and destroyers TARTAR, ESKIMO, BEDOUIN and PUNJABI departed Scapa Flow for Loch Ewe (the small port of Aultbrea on Loch Ewe, designated Port A for security reasons). En route TARTAR, BEDOUIN and PUNJABI detached to join the aircraft carrier ARK ROYAL.

15th – At 0700 hours RODNEY, HOOD, and destroyer ESKIMO arrived at Loch Ewe.

At 0845 hours SOMALI arrived at Loch Ewe and FEARLESS, FORESTER, FOXHOUND and FURY sailed from Loch Ewe.

17th – At Loch Ewe where she was visited by the First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill.

At 0700 hours NELSON and ARK ROYAL arrived at Loch Ewe.

At 0955 hours BEDOUIN and TARTAR sailed from Loch Ewe.

At 1440 hours ARK ROYAL sailed from Loch Ewe.

20th – At 1915 hours the Home Fleet comprising the battleships NELSON and RODNEY, battlecruisers HOOD and REPULSE, aircraft carrier ARK ROYAL, and destroyers FIREDRAKE, FORTUNE, TARTAR and PUNJABI sailed from Loch Ewe for Scapa Flow.

At 2000 hours the Fleet was in position 57-56N, 05 $\frac{1}{2}$ - 40'W

21st – Early in the morning off Cape Wrath the Fleet was joined by the destroyers FAULK NOR, FOXHOUND, FURY, FEARLESS, FORESTER and FORESIGHT from Scapa Flow.

At 1000 hours the Fleet arrived at Scapa Flow.

22nd – At 1100 hours the Home Fleet comprising NELSON (Flag), RODNEY, HOOD, REPULSE, ARK ROYAL and destroyers FAME, FORESIGHT, FIREDRAKE, FORTUNE, FAULK NOR, FOXHOUND, FEARLESS, MATABELE, MASHONA and SOMALI sailed from Scapa Flow to provide cover for Operation SK. Operation SK was an operation by the cruisers of the 2nd CS and destroyers to penetrate deep into the Skagerrak. The major objective was to draw out heavy German Fleet units and lead them towards the Home Fleet covering force. The secondary objectives were to investigate reports that a boom had been laid across the entrance to the Kattegat, to sink any German ships encountered and exercise contraband control.

At 0400/22/9/39 the cruisers SOUTHAMPTON (Flag) and GLASGOW of 2nd CS, AURORA and SHEFFIELD of 18th CS escorted by destroyers TARTAR, BEDOUIN, PUNJABI and ESKIMO of 6th DF and JERVIS, JERSEY, JAVELIN and JUPITER of the 7th DF sailed from Rosyth. At 1400 hours in position 57-09N, 03-08E the destroyer JERSEY collided with JAVELIN. At 2222/22/9/39 the VA commanding the 2nd CS abandoned the operation due to the collision between JERSEY and JAVELIN)

23rd – At 0617 hours the Home Fleet reversed course and steered for Scapa Flow.

At 1333 hours in position 58-11N, 00-26W an explosion was felt and observed approximately 4 miles distant. The destroyers FORTUNE, FIREDRAKE, MASHONA and MATABELE were detached to investigate.

1910 hours the Home Fleet arrived back at Scapa Flow.

(On 24/9/39 the submarine SPEARFISH whilst operating in the German Bight, was heavily damaged by German warships off Horns Reef in the shallow water of the Heligoland Bight. The submarine's periscope had been blown away, the wireless was smashed, the engines disabled and seawater threatened to reach the batteries and start a release of chlorine gas. Knowing that if he surfaced he would be unable to dive again her captain Lt. John Eaden RN surfaced and in the darkness made for Danish territorial waters and crept north on the submarine's one remaining electrical motor. At 1510/25/9/39, after making temporary repairs to the wireless Eaden was able to signal his plight. SPEARFISH estimated her position at 0630/25/9/39 would be 56-46N, 08-00E. The Admiralty then set in operation a rescue plan. At 0723/25/9/39 the Humber Force cruisers SOUTHAMPTON and GLASGOW departed Rosyth to assist SPEARFISH and the destroyers SOMALI, MATABELE, MASHONA, and ESKIMO, already off the Norwegian coast at 60N proceeded to join the CinC HF)

25th – At 0830 hours the Home Fleet comprising battleships NELSON and RODNEY, aircraft carrier ARK ROYAL, and destroyers BEDOUIN, PUNJABI, TARTAR, FURY sailed from Scapa Flow and steered westerly to provide cover the Humber Force returning with the damaged submarine SPEARFISH. The destroyers FAME and FORESIGHT who were at sea joined the NELSON force at sea. The destroyers SOMALI, ESKIMO, MASHONA and MATABELE also later joined at sea.

FORESIGHT attacked a submarine contact north of the Orkneys.

At 1724, MATABELE was detached to investigate Danish steamer OVE TOFT (2135grt) and did not rejoin the Fleet until after dark.

At 1925, SOMALI and ESKIMO were detached to join SPEARFISH, reaching her in position 57-04N, 06-40E at 0100/26th

26th – At 1100 hours the Fleet were in position 57-36N, 03-18E, steering 285 $\frac{1}{4}$, with Swordfish from the ARK ROYAL patrolling above the Fleet. When 3 large aircraft were sighted, later identified as Luftwaffe Dornier 18D flying boats. The enemy aircraft were shot down or driven off by Skuas from ARK ROYAL, but not before they had

sent off a sighting report.

At approximately 1345 hours RODNEY's Type 79Y radar reported two or three groups of aircraft, Nine He 111 and four Ju 88 bombers, at approximately 80 miles and closing. RODNEY kept the CinC HF informed of the incoming attack by flag signals. Even so the Fleet was unprepared for the attack; RODNEY felt that her radar reports had not been taken seriously.

At 1420 hours the fleet was subjected to an air attack in which the ARK ROYAL was near missed by a 1000Kg bomb dropped by a He 111.

During the attacks all the heavy ships opened fire with both long and close range weapons but their fire was ineffective.

27th – In the early morning the fleet arrived back at Scapa.

October

1st – At 1700 hours the Home Fleet comprising NELSON (Flag), RODNEY, HOOD, REPULSE, ARK ROYAL, light cruiser NEWCASTLE and destroyers ASHANTI, MASHONA, MATABELE, SOMALI, FAME, FORESIGHT, FORTUNE and FIREDRAKE sailed from Scapa Flow for Loch Ewe.

(This movement was in accordance with Admiralty instructions and in pursuance of the policy of evading air attack on Scapa Flow)

2nd – At 0700 hours the Fleet arrived at Loch Ewe.

5th – At 2000 hours the Home Fleet comprising NELSON (Flag), RODNEY, HOOD, REPULSE, FURIOUS and escorting destroyers sailed from Loch Ewe for Scapa Flow.

6th – At 1000 hours The Fleet arrived at Scapa Flow.

In the late afternoon HM the King embarked in AURORA arrived in Scapa Flow and visited various ships of the Fleet.

8th - Over night the CinC Home Fleet was made aware that the German navy was about to launch a sortie by heavy units.

At 1320 hours the CinC Home Fleet received firm information from the RAF when one of Coastal Command's Hudson aircraft of 224 Sqd. sighted the German battlecruiser GNEISENAU and the cruiser KOLN and 9 destroyers off Lister lighthouse (Lindesnes LH southern Norway) steaming north at 20 knots.

(The purpose of the Kriegsmarine sortie was to sink any allied shipping found and to entice out the Home Fleet onto four U-boats that were deployed in a line across what was the probable interception course of the Home Fleet and to bring the Home Fleet into range of Luftwaffe bombers)

(The CinC Home Fleets plan was to sail two forces, The Home Fleet from Scapa Flow, Force F and the Humber Force from Rosyth, Force E. The Home Fleet was divided into the battlecruisers and the battleships. Force F would go north of the assumed course of the enemy force then move south and Force E would sail north. The two Forces would then execute a pincer movement and trap the enemy force between them. This failed to happen since the German force reversed course and arrived back at Kiel at 0100/10/10/39)

8th – At 1840 hours the battleships NELSON, RODNEY, aircraft carrier FURIOUS, light cruisers AURORA, SHEFFIELD and NEWCASTLE and destroyers SOMALI, MASHONA, ASHANTI, ESKIMO, BEDOUIN, PUNJABI, FAULKNOR, FURY, FORESTER, FAME, FORESIGHT, FORTUNE and FIREDRAKE. Sailed from Scapa Flow for position 61N, 00E. Heavy weather damaged FORTUNE as the force entered the Pentland Firth and she detached to the Clyde for repairs.

11th – At 1200 hours when in the Minches, FAULKNOR detached for the Clyde to repair weather damage.

At 1300 hours battleships NELSON and RODNEY, battlecruiser HOOD, and destroyers BEDOUIN, PUNJABI, FURY and FORESTER and FIREDRAKE arrived at Loch Ewe.

13th – At 1025 hours the aircraft carrier FURIOUS and destroyers FEARLESS and FOXHOUND arrived at Loch Ewe.

14th – At 1500 hours the light cruisers AURORA (Flag CS18) and BELFAST arrived at Loch Ewe.

15th – At 1730 hours the Home Fleet comprising the battleships NELSON and RODNEY, battlecruiser HOOD,

aircraft carrier FURIOUS, cruisers BELFAST and AURORA and destroyers BEDOUIN, FEARLESS, FOXHOUND and FURY sailed from Loch Ewe to cover and assist the Northern Patrol in intercepting a large number of German merchant ships that were believed to be attempting to return to Germany.

16th – At 0715 hours the Fleet was in position 60-52N, 8-33W.

17th – At 0800 hours the Fleet was in approximate position 66-55N, 11-56W.

At 1030 hours the Fleet crossed the Arctic circle.

In the latitude of the Arctic Circle, north east of Iceland, the destroyers were refuelled from the capital ships.

At 1415 hours FURIOUS flew off aircraft.

18th – At 0800 hours the Fleet was in position 68-26N, 13-48W.

At 0853 hours FURIOUS flew off aircraft.

19th – At 0800 hours the Fleet was in approximate position 68-25N, 13-45W.

At 1200 hours REPULSE, JERVIS and JERSEY joined the Home Fleet in the Iceland Faroes gap.

22nd - At 0800 hours the Fleet arrived back at Loch Ewe.

At 1830 hours the Home Fleet comprising battleships NELSON and RODNEY, battlecruiser HOOD, and destroyers INTREPID, IVANHOE, ICARUS, KELLY and KINGSTON sailed from Loch Ewe to provide distant cover for convoy NV 1 of twelve British iron ore ships from Narvik. In this operation the Fleet cruised up to the Lofoten Islands and as far north as 68¼N.

(The ships of convoy NV1 had been waiting at Narvik until the Admiralty could provide an escort. The convoy sailed from Narvik on 26/9/39 and was met at 1000/26/9/39 by their close escort of destroyers SOMALI, ASHANTI, TARTAR and FAME covered by cruisers AURORA and EDINBURGH. At 0005/31/10/39 SOMALI obtained a sub contact and carried out a DC attack without result, this was probably U 13. Ten ships of the convoy arrived safely at Methil Roads on 31/10/39, the other two ships were escorted to Cape Wrath by FAME)

23rd – At 2000 hours the Fleet was in position 58-20N, 5-34W.

24th – At 0715 hours the Fleet was in position 60-12N, 3-06W.

25th - At 0700 hours the Fleet was in position 64-08N, 2-59W.

26th – At 0712 hours the Fleet was in position 67-27N, 10-58W.

The destroyer IMPULSIVE joined the Home Fleet at sea.

27th – At 0800 hours the Fleet was in approximate position 66-01N, 2-00E.

28th – At 0800 hours the Fleet was in approximate position 62-04N, 1-47W.

29th – At 0800 hours the Fleet was in position 59-51N, 4-22W.

30th – At 0800 hours the Fleet was in approximate position 59-41N, 5-01W.

At approximately 1000 hours when west of the Orkneys returning to the Clyde, the Home Fleet comprising NELSON, RODNEY, HOOD, and destroyers ICARUS, IMPULSIVE, IVANHOE, INTREPID and KELLY ran into a line of 4 U-boats. U 56 fired three torpedoes at NELSON and all three struck the target, two broke upon hitting and the other failed to explode. The crew of NELSON and the other ships of the Fleet were unaware of the attack.

31st – At 0900 hours the Fleet arrived in the Clyde off Greenock.

(On 31st October, whilst in the Clyde, the CinC HF received a visit from the first Lord of the Admiralty, the First Sea Lord and the Deputy Chief of Air Staff, to discuss the question of Bases and their protection against aircraft and Submarines. The Admiralty's proposal was to make the Clyde the main fleet base, but the CinC strongly demurred as a whole day would be wasted in getting into the northern part of the north Sea as compared with Scapa or Rosyth. The Deputy Chief of the Air staff was of opinion that the defence of the Clyde against air attack was much better than that of Rosyth because of the greater chance of interception by fighters. The first Sea Lord advocated using the Clyde as the main base with the main fleet working in two watches - one at sea, the other in harbour. The CinC said that he preferred Rosyth to the Clyde, but if the Admiralty considered the risk of using Rosyth was not worth taking, he must work with the main fleet in two watches and would require five

flotillas of destroyers. He also pointed out that a submarine could get under the net on the Clyde, and it was decided to lay a deep minefield out aide the net)

November

2nd – At 0930 hours battleships NELSON and RODNEY, battlecruiser HOOD, and destroyers FAULKNOR (D8), FORTUNE, ICARUS, INTREPID, IVANHOE, IMPULSIVE, FORESIGHT and PUNJABI sailed from the Clyde and headed north and to the west of the Hebrides. Their mission was to provide distant cover for 3 operations:

1 - The search for the captured US freighter SS CITY OF FLINT 4963grt

2/3 - Cover for convoys ON 1 and HN 2.

(The CITY OF FLINT, clearly marked as neutral, had been stopped on 9/10/39 in approximate position 41-30N, 46-30W, by the German panzerschiffe DEUTSCHLAND. She was carrying general cargo to the UK including lubricating oil. The lubricating oil was declared contraband and the CITY OF FLINT was seized, a prize crew was put on board and she was sailed to Murmansk, where she arrived on 23/10/39. The CITY OF FLINT sailed from Murmansk on 28/10/39 heading for Germany via the Indreled Norwegian territorial waters. On 3/11/39 the CITY OF FLINT anchored off the port of Haugesund, where she was boarded by a Norwegian naval boarding party from the minelayer OLAV TRYGGVASON and returned to US ownership. From 29/10/39 the destroyers KELLY (D5), ESKIMO, MATABELE, BEDOUIN, FEARLESS and FOXHOUND were off the Norwegian coast searching for the CITY OF FLINT. From 1/11/39 the destroyers were covered by the cruisers GLASGOW and NEWCASTLE.

The search was called off on 3/11/39 and the searching forces dispersed. 5/11/39 destroyers KELLY, BEDOUIN, ESKIMO and MATABELE arrived at Scapa Flow)

3rd – At 0200 hours the Fleet was off the Flannan Islands.

At 0800 hours the Fleet was in position 59-30N, 8-06W.

At 1135 hours the destroyers IMPERIAL and PUNJABI were detached on a submarine hunt.

At 1930 hours when the Fleet reached position 61N, 3-40W, FAULKNOR, FORTUNE and INTREPID were detached to refuel at Sullom Voe.

4th – At 0800 hours the Fleet was in approximate position 62-15N, 00-25E.

Destroyer PUNJABI detached to refuel at Scapa Flow, then to join convoy ON 1.

(1700/4/11/39 convoy ON 1, of 5 mercantiles, sailed from Methil Roads escorted by destroyers SOMALI, ASHANTI, TARTAR and FAME. At 0810/5/11/39 the AA cruiser CURLEW joined ON 1. At 1700/5/11/39 FAME detached to refuel at Scapa and PUNJABI joined. At 0700/6/11/39 ASHANTI detached to Sullom Voe with an evaporator defect. At 0730/7/39 the convoy dispersed in Aspo Fjord)

5th – Destroyers FEARLESS, FOXHOUND, IMPERIAL and KANDAHAR joined the Force.

FAULKNOR, FORTUNE and INTREPID rejoined.

FORESIGHT and IVANHOE detached to refuel.

6th – Destroyer FAME joined the Force.

7th – Destroyers ICARUS and IMPULSIVE were detached to refuel at Kirkwall.

(1700/7/11/39 convoy HN 1, of 8 mercantiles, sailed from Aspo Fjord escorted by destroyers SOMALI and TARTAR and AA cruiser CURLEW. At 1800/8/39 ASHANTI joined. At 0930/9/11/39 in position 59-02N, 01-50W destroyers MAORI and ZULU joined, then detached with 2 mercantiles westward via the Fair Isle Channel. At 1600/9/11/39 ASHANTI detached to escort a straggler. At 1700/9/11/39 CURLEW detached for Scapa. 10/11/39 convoy HN 1 arrived in Methil Roads)

8th – Destroyers FORESIGHT and IVANHOE rejoined the Force.

At 1545 hours east of the Copinsay lighthouse HOOD detached with FEARLESS and they proceeded through the Pentland Firth.

9th – At 0810 hours NELSON, RODNEY destroyers FAULKNOR, FAME, FORTUNE, FOXHOUND,

FORESIGHT, FEARLESS and IMPERIAL arrived at Rosyth.

At Rosyth were the AA cruisers CAIRO and CALCUTTA who had arrived on 6/11/39 to strengthen the air defences at Rosyth while the Home Fleet was refuelling there.

12th – At 1400 hours NELSON, RODNEY, and destroyers FAULKNOR, FORTUNE, FORESIGHT, FOXHOUND, FAME departed Rosyth to carry out full calibre firings off Cape Wrath, then proceed on patrol between the Faroes and Norway to cover convoys ON.2 and HN.2

At sea the destroyer FAME joined the Force.

(12/11/39 convoy ON 2, of one freighter, sailed from Methil Roads escorted by the destroyer IMPERIAL. At 0730/14/11/39 the AA cruiser CAIRO joined the escort. At 1310/14/11/39 IMPERIAL detached from ON 2 for Sullom Voe. At 1600/14/11/39 the destroyers ICARUS and IMOGEN, from Sullom Voe joined convoy ON 2. 15/11/39 ON 2 arrived in Aspo Fjord)

13th – At 0830 hours in approximate position 58-40N, 3-30W, the Force was joined by the destroyers IMPULSIVE and IMOGEN from Scapa Flow.

At 0945 hours the destroyer ICARUS joined the Force from Scapa Flow.

At 1100 hours the Force arrived off Cape Wrath.

After carrying out a full calibre shoot the Force proceeded north to patrol off the Faroes.

At 2000 hours in approximate position 60-20N, 2-30W, ICARUS, IMPULSIVE and IMOGEN detached for Sullom Voe.

(0915/15/11/39 convoy HN 2, of 11 mercantiles, sailed from Aspo Fjord escorted by destroyers ICARUS, IMOGEN and IMPERIAL and the AA cruiser CAIRO. At 0800/18/11/39 convoy HN 2 arrived in Methil Roads)

16th – At 1000 hours at latitude 61N the CinC HF decided to return to the Clyde. He had intended to stay on patrol for a further two days but he cut short the patrol due to the weather which was so bad that it was impossible to detach his destroyers to refuel at Sullom Voe.

En route to the Clyde the CinC HF received a signal stating that the Clyde was closed to shipping on account of the faulty laying of the new deep, anti-submarine, minefield. This minefield was in the process of being swept.

The CinC decided to refuel in Loch Ewe.

17th – At 0600 hours the Force arrived in Loch Ewe to refuel.

20th – At 0730 hours NELSON, RODNEY, and destroyers FAULKNOR, FIREDRAKE, FORTUNE, FOXHOUND, FAME, SOMALI and TARTAR sailed from Loch Ewe for the Clyde.

21st – At 0100 hours the Force arrived off Greenock.

Whilst in the Clyde Captain Frederick Hew George Dalrymple-Hamilton RN took over command of RODNEY.

23rd - At 1551 hours the CinC Home Fleet received a signal from HM Armed Merchant Cruiser RAWLPINDI, patrolling the Iceland Faroes gap in position 63-38N, 11-55W, timed at 1545 hours stating she had sighted a German Battlecruiser, this was quickly changed identifying the vessel as the panzerschiffe DEUTSCHLAND (The first sighting report was in fact correct what she had sighted was the SCHARNHORST with GNEISENAU in company). The CinC HF immediately ordered all available Home Fleet ships in the Clyde to raise steam.

At 1920 hours NELSON, RODNEY, the heavy cruiser DEVONSHIRE and the destroyers FAULKNOR, FORESTER, FORTUNE, FIREDRAKE, FAME, FORESIGHT and FURY sailed from the Clyde.

(At 1400/21/11/39 the German battlecruisers SCHARNHORST and GNEISENAU departed Wilhelmshaven and sailed north. Their mission was to disrupt the Northern Patrol and to make a feint into the North Atlantic to relieve the pressure off the panzerschiffe ADMIRAL GRAF SPEE who was operating in the South Atlantic. The first indication that the Admiralty had that the battlecruisers were at sea was the signal from RAWLPINDI. But this signal of course led the Admiralty to believe that the enemy was the panzerschiffe DEUTSCHLAND who, again unbeknown to the Admiralty had arrived back in Kiel on 15/11/39)

24th – At 0100 hours off the Mull of Kintyre the Fleet was joined by the destroyers SOMALI, ASHANTI, PUNJABI and MASHONA. Course was then set to proceed via the Minches and the Pentland Firth towards position 58-36N, 03-00E. On the way north the Fleet ran into a severe gale and FAME, FORESIGHT and FORTUNE suffered weather damage.

FAME and FORESIGHT detached and returned to the Clyde for repairs.

At 1600 hours in the Pentland Firth FORTUNE detached to take over the patrol of the Pentland Firth from BEDOUIN, who then joined the Fleet.

25th – At 0800 hours the cruiser DEVONSHIRE was detached on Admiralty orders to join the cruiser patrol line at 61- 35N.

At 1600 hours the fleet arrived at their interception position at 62.30N approximately 120 miles off the Norwegian coast. For the next three days the fleet patrolled in this area and the destroyers were refuelled in relays at Sullom Voe.

It was the intention of CinC Home Fleet to remain on patrol until the DEUTSCHLAND (sic) made a bid for home. (However due to poor weather with visibility reduced to 1 to 2 miles the German battlecruisers evaded the various patrol lines of the Home Fleet and returned to Wilhelmshaven at 1300/27/11/39 albeit with weather damage)

28th – At 1000 hours destroyers SOMALI, ASHANTI and PUNJABI detached to refuel at Sullom Voe then to join the HOOD.

(In the early morning of 29/11/39 the CinC HF received a message from the Admiralty, stating that they were against maintaining a patrol in U-Boat waters in approximately the same position for any considerable time, and suggesting abandoning the present patrol line and making a sweep to the northward so as to sweep out just north of latitude 65N, by daylight)

29th – At 0800 hours the CinC HF ordered all forces to sweep to the northward.

At 2200 hours during the sweep to the north off the Norwegian coast RODNEY suffered a serious rudder defect. She was ordered to detach and proceed to the Clyde.

(The rudder design of the NELSON class was poor. This was attributable to having twin screws and an inadequate single centre rudder which was out of the propeller race. The problem was recognised and the NELSON's rudder was reinforced but RODNEY's had not. In February 1940 the CinC in his report that it was evident that the design of the rudder was too weak to stand the strain of constant steaming in rough seas and zig-zagging)

RODNEY escorted by destroyers GURKHA and KANDAHAR detached and set course for the Clyde. Because of her steering difficulties she went west of the Shetlands and the Isle of Lewis.

December

1st – At 1200 hours in approximate position 56-48N, 08-03W, RODNEY escorted by destroyers GURKHA and KANDAHAR, RVed with HOOD and her escort of destroyers SOMALI, ASHANTI and PUNJABI.

2nd – At 0200 hours off Holy Island PUNJABI was in collision with the SS LAIRDCREST 789grt.
At 0400 hours RODNEY arrived off Greenock. Examination of her rudder found that about one third had been torn away.

7th - RODNEY, escorted by the destroyers IMPERIAL, IMPULSIVE and GURKHA and three more destroyers and two tugs departed the Clyde for Liverpool. She steered using her engines as the rudder was now ineffective.

9th – RODNEY by destroyers ECLIPSE, GURKHA and FEARLESS, arrived at Liverpool for repairs. The ships followed convoy SLF 10B into port. On arrival RODNEY entered the Gladstone dock for repairs.

(On 4/12/39 the NELSON was mined this put pressure on the repairers to release RODNEY as soon as possible. This led to the repairs being rushed and not carried out to the best quality)

30th – At 1230 hours RODNEY escorted by the destroyers ICARUS and IMOGEN sailed from Liverpool for the Clyde.

31st – At 0140 hours RODNEY arrived off Greenock and rejoined the Home Fleet.

1940

January

1st – In the Clyde off Greenock where the CinC Home Fleet Admiral of the Fleet Sir Charles Forbes hoisted his flag.

4th – The Home Fleet comprising battleship RODNEY Flag, REPULSE and destroyers INGLEFIELD, IMOGEN, ICARUS, MOHAWK, BEDOUIN, KINGSTON, FIREDRAKE and MATABELE sailed from Greenock to patrol in the vicinity of the Shetland Islands to provide distant cover for the Northern Patrol and the Norwegian convoys.

10th – RODNEY, REPULSE and destroyers INGLEFIELD, IMOGEN, ICARUS, MOHAWK, BEDOUIN, KINGSTON and MATABELE arrived back at Greenock.

27th – At 1030 hours The Home Fleet comprising battleship RODNEY (Flag CinC HF), REPULSE and destroyers FAULKNOR, FAME, FEARLESS, FORESIGHT, FORTUNE, FOXHOUND and FURY sailed from Greenock to patrol in the vicinity of the Shetland Islands to provide distant cover for the Northern Patrol and the Norwegian convoys.

31st – At 1500 hours RODNEY, REPULSE and destroyers FAULKNOR, FAME, FEARLESS, FORESIGHT, FORTUNE, FOXHOUND and FURY arrived back at Greenock.

(In his report on the first 6 months of the war at sea the CinC HF stated that 'the weather experienced in Northern Waters from October could only be described as foul; one gale had followed another with monotonous frequency'. The effect of the bad weather on RODNEY had already exposed the design weakness of her rudder and by the end of February she was experiencing problems with 'panting' of her hull plating. The term 'panting' when used in the context of a ships hull applies to out-of-plane movement causing the formation of secondary bending stresses which are produced when a deformed panel is subjected to in-plane edge loads. This action causes fatigue which leads to cracking. RODNEY had to have work carried out to rectify the damaged plating)

February

4th – Off Greenock church parties from RODNEY and REPULSE attended divisions on HOOD.

(At 2400/17/2/1940 the German battlecruisers SCHARNHORST and GNEISENAU, heavy cruiser ADMIRAL HIPPER and destroyers Z20 KARL GALSTER, Z21 WILHELM HEIDKAMP and Z9 WOLFGANG ZENKER sailed from Wilhelmshaven on Operation NORDMARK [Operation NORDMARK was an operation to intercept British convoys between Bergen and the UK] Almost immediately the WOLFGANG ZENKER was damaged by ice and forced to abort the mission. North Of Heligoland the force was joined by the destroyers Z5 PAUL JACOBI, Z6 THEODOR RIEDEL, Z7 HERMANN SCHOEMANN, Z1 LEBERECHT MAAS and the torpedo boats LUCHS and SEEDLER. At 0055/18/2/1940 [GMT] the German Force was sighted by a RAF reconnaissance flight, but this information didn't reach the CinC HF until 0930 hours. The German Force proceeded to approximate position 60-30N, 3-20E, which they gained at 1130/19/2/1940, and having failed to sight any shipping the Force returned to Wilhelmshaven, where they arrived at 1400/20/2/1940.

At the time of the German sortie convoy ON 14 was at sea. The convoy of 24 ships had sailed from Methil Roads at 1600/17/2/40 escorted by the destroyers ESCAPADE, ESCORT, ECLIPSE and ELECTRA and the submarine NARWHAL. At 1200/19/2/1940 the Admiralty ordered the convoy in to Kirkwall until the HF arrived in support. Convoy ON 14 all arrived at Kirkwall at 0200/20/2/1940)

19th – At 1430 hours RODNEY (Flag CinC HF), HOOD, and destroyers FAULKNOR, FEARLESS, FOXHOUND, FURY, FORESIGHT, FORTUNE and FIREDRAKE sailed from Greenock.

At 2000 hours the Force was in position 55-16N, 5-53W.

At 2100 hours having cleared the Clyde they set course to pass through The Minches.

At 2300 hours in approximate position 55-45N, 6-45W the destroyer HARDY joined the force from the Clyde.

20th – At 0800 hours the Force was in position 57-41N, 6-34W.

At 1200 hours off Cape Wrath the destroyer KHARTOUM joined from Scapa.

At 1500 hours west of the Orkneys the destroyers KANDAHAR and TARTAR joined from Scapa.

At 1650 hours the destroyer FORTUNE detached to investigate a possible submarine contact.

At 2000 hours approximate position 60-13N, 4-35W was reached.

(At 1400/20/2/1940 convoy ON 14 sailed from Kirkwall for Bergen)

21st – At 0800 hours the Force was in approximate position 61-56N, 00- 58W.

At 1620 hours the destroyer HARDY detached to investigate a possible submarine contact.

At 2000 hours approximate position 62-06N, 2-20'E was reached.

At 2100 hours the destroyer FIREDRAKE detached to investigate a possible submarine contact.

22nd – At 0750 hours FIREDRAKE rejoined.

At 0800 hours the Force was in approximate position 61-16N, 1-53W.

At 2100 hours in approximate position 62N, 2-30W the force turned west and then south, heading back to the Clyde.

23rd – At 0800 hours the Force was in position 59-47N, 05-53W.

At 0945 hours the destroyer HARDY rejoined.

At 1030 hours off the island of North Rona the RODNEY and HOOD carried out a HA firing exercise.

24th – At 0620 hours when approaching the North Channel RODNEY's steering failed. HOOD and her destroyer screen of HARDY, FIREDRAKE and FEARLESS detached and proceeded into the Clyde.

At 1300 hours RODNEY with destroyers FAULKNER, FORESIGHT and FORTUNE arrived at Greenock.

27th – Off Greenock the RODNEY was visited by the King and Queen and the First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill. The royal party took tea on board with the CinC HF.

March

(The conference on 31/10/1939 had actioned improvements to Scapa Flows defences. By the 1/3/1940 the improvements to Scapa Flow's anti-aircraft defences were substantially complete and with improvements in the anti-submarine defences on-going. The CinC HF decided that the Home Fleet could again be based in the Flow. The First heavy ships to arrive were HOOD and VALIANT who arrived on 7/3.1940)

7th – At 1615 hours RODNEY (Flag C-in-C, HF and with the First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill embarked), battlecruisers RENOWN and REPULSE with destroyers HARDY (D2), HOSTILE, INGLEFIELD (D3), IMOGEN, FOXHOUND, FORTUNE, FIREDRAKE, PUNJABI and KIMBERLEY sailed from the Clyde for Scapa.

8th – At 1730 hours the Fleet was approaching the entrance to Flow when the CinC was informed that the Hoxa gate was closed as it was thought that a hostile aircraft (possibly a He 111 of KG 26) had dropped mines in approximate position one mile 055¼ from the north east end of the Calf of Flotta.

Winston Churchill was transferred by rowing boat to the destroyer KIMBERLEY who then took Churchill into Scapa via the Switha Sound gate, thence to the HOOD, on which Churchill spent the night.

The remainder of the Fleet cruised off the west of the Orkneys while the Flow was swept for mines, none were found.

9th – At 1045 hours RODNEY, RENOWN, REPULSE with destroyers HARDY, HOSTILE, INGLEFIELD, IMOGEN, FOXHOUND, FORTUNE, FIREDRAKE, PUNJABI, FAULKNER and FORESTER arrived in Scapa Flow.

(On the afternoon of 9/3/1940, a meeting was held on the RODNEY to review the state of the Flows defences. Attending were the First Lord and Civil Lord of the Admiralty, the CinC HF and his Chief of Staff, The Vice Admiral Commanding Orkneys and Shetlands, the Rear Admiral Scapa, the Adjutant General Royal Marines, the Director of Local Defence Division, the Director of Naval Air Division and the Civil Engineer in Chief. The state of the defences was:-

Anti-Aircraft defences

55 HAA guns mounted, 39 in action, remainder expected to be in action within the week. A further 33 to be mounted. Ammunition available 300 rounds per gun out of 1200 rounds per gun to be available.

14 LAA [single mark VIII 2lb pom-poms] out of a total (of ?) to be provided.

30 A/A searchlights out of a total of 56.

9 barrage balloons deployed out of a total of 56.

The gun operations room at Kirkwall in action.

Netherbutton RDF [Chain Home Radar station] operational but inefficient in all directions.

Three squadrons of Hurricanes at Wick, Nos. 43, 111 and 504, out of five to be stationed there.

The Sector Controller at Wick in action, but the extra telephone lines required not yet working so there was a time lag.

At RNAS Hatson, HMS Sparrowhawk, one and half squadrons of Skuas and Rocs, 800 and 803 squadrons and one squadron of Gladiators, 804 squadron.

Anti-Submarine defences

Booms; Hoxa and Switha, still only single lines of nets. Hoy, six sections of the second line of nets completed. Boom depot at Howton Bay barely started.

Nevi Skerry boom; some moorings in place, no nets.

Defence electric lights and 12-pdr. Guns at ends of booms not in place.

Controlled mining; Hoxa and Switha complete, Hoy very nearly so. Controlled mining base at St Margaret's Hope barely started.

Indicator Loops between Switha Island and South Ronaldsay completed. Harbour defence asdic [sonar] in Hoxa Sound not complete.

Blocking of the Eastern Sounds; Some blockships had been put down since October 1939, but there were still passages in all four Sounds through which a submarine could pass at slack water high tide. None of the three defence electric lights or 12-pdr. Guns for the defence of the Sounds were ready for action, but those on the mainland were to be ready in a day or two.

The CinC HF considered that the meeting served a useful purpose in enabling the deficiencies to be brought to notice and doubtful points to be cleared up. It was decided that work on all parts of the defences must be pressed on, and steps should be taken to close the Eastern Sounds by building a causeway across them, these causeways became the Churchill Barriers)

16th – At 1952 hours the Home Fleet in Scapa Flow came under attack from 34 Luftwaffe bombers, 16 He 111 of 3./KG 26 and 18 Ju 88 of KG 30. The first formation of 3 bombers approached from the east at 7000 feet, when over the Flow they split and their selected targets were the RODNEY, RENOWN, the heavy cruiser NORFOLK. Dive bombing attacks were carried out on RODNEY, RENOWN and NORFOLK; two 250Kg bombs were dropped by each dive bomber. No hits were scored on RODNEY or RENOWN but NORFOLK was hit on the quarter deck port side abaft Y turret. The old battleship IRON DUKE was also damaged by 3 near misses.

(The first warning of the air attack came from the destroyer KASHMIR, escorting convoy ON 20; she reported the approach of German aircraft toward Scapa Flow. A warning was also received from the Sumburgh RDF station on Shetland, but the raid had not been picked up by Netherbutton RDF station, confirming its inefficiency. Shortly after the attack on the fleet attacks were made on Hatson and Bridge of Wraith. In the attack Bridge of Wraith the first British civilian to be killed in the war was killed. The returning German pilots reported having hit 3 battleships and a cruiser)

19th – At 1445 hours RODNEY, WARSPITE and VALIANT escorted by destroyers HARDY (D2), HERO, HUNTER, HASTY, HOTSPUR, HYPERION and HOSTILE sailed from Scapa Flow.

(This sailing was on Admiralty instructions, following the Luftwaffe attack on the 16/3/40, that the Fleet should be at sea during the moonlight period between 19th and 26th March, because it was thought that the German air force might try to drive the Fleet out of Scapa Flow)

During the period of maximum moonlight the Fleet cruised to the north of the Shetlands and provided heavy cover for the Norwegian convoy HN 20 and ON 21 and the Operation DU activities.

Operation DU was a sweep by 4 cruisers of the 2nd CS and 8 supporting destroyers into the Skagerrak that was carried out on the 21/22 March)

27th – At 1100 hours RODNEY, WARSPITE and VALIANT escorted by destroyers FEARLESS, FORESTER, HUNTER, HASTY, HERO, HOTSPUR, HARDY, HOSTILE and HYPERION arrived back at Scapa Flow.

April

(For various reasons strategic reasons Hitler decided to invade Norway. Operation Weserubung and was a combined operation to land German troops at various points in Norway timed to commence at 0415/9/4/40. The Germans achieved complete surprise even though various 'intelligence' was available but was ignored.

The Y service that monitored German radio traffic detected an increase in German naval radio traffic

in the Baltic and this traffic was analysed by Harry Hinsley at GC and CS who informed the Admiralty that a possible invasion was under way. The Admiralty dismissed Hinsley's analyst out of hand.

At 0800/7/4/40, 24 miles west of Horns Reef a RAF Hudson of 220 Sqd. sighted a cruiser and six destroyers steering north. Report received by CinC Home Fleet at 1120 hours. This report set the Home Fleet in motion.

The 23 Wellingtons of 9 and 115 Sqd. and 12 Blenheims of 107 Sqd. sent to attack this force failed to locate them. However at 1415 hours 7 Blenheims of 21 Sqd located and attacked another force comprising a battlecruiser, pocket battleship, 3 cruisers and 12 destroyers 78 miles NNW of Horns Reef steering 335¼.

Report received by CinC Home Fleet at 1727 hours.

This report was subsequently amended in Admiralty message at 2057 hours stating that photographs confirmed that one of the ships was GNEISENAU class.

Following this last report the CinC Home Fleet decided that a German assault on Norway was in progress and all ships in Scapa Flow were ordered to raise steam. The Admiralty at first judged that the German fleet movements were to cover the breakout of heavy fleet units into the Atlantic)

(At 0000/7/4/40 Group 1 of Operation Weserubung, the Narvik attack force, sailed from Bremerhaven, the Group consisted of battlecruisers GNEISENAU and SCHARNHORST and destroyers WILHELM HEIDKAMP, GEORG THIELE, WOLFGANG ZENKER, BERND VON ARNIM, ERICH GIESE, ERICH KOELLNER, DIETHER VON ROEDER, HANS LUDEMANN, HERMANN KUNNE and ANTON SCHMIDT carrying 2000 troops of the 139th Gebirgsjager Regiment, 3rd Mountain Division.

At 0000/7/4/40 Group 2 of Operation Weserubung, the Trondheim attack force, sailed from Cuxhaven, the Group consisted of cruiser ADMIRAL HIPPER and destroyers PAUL JACOBI, THEODOR RIEDEL, BRUNO HEINEMANN and FRIEDRICH ECKHOLDT carrying 1700 troops of the 138th Gebirgsjager Regiment, 3rd Mountain Division.

At 0200 hours SW of Heligoland the two groups joined up and steered in a north easterly direction.)

7th – At 2015 hours the Home Fleet comprising RODNEY (Flag CinC HF), VALIANT, battlecruiser REPULSE, light cruisers SHEFFIELD, PENELOPE and the French EMILE BERTIN, destroyers ESKIMO, PUNJABI, BEDOUIN, KIMBERLEY, JUPITER, CODRINGTON (D.1), GRIFFIN, BRAZEN, ESCAPADE and ELECTRA sailed from Scapa Flow and steered easterly. After clearing the Pentland Firth course was set for 61-00N, 01-00E.

8th – At 0200 hours the EMILE BERTIN having lost contact with the Fleet turned back to Scapa Flow. Between 0759 hours and 0904 hours the CinC Home Fleet received signals from the destroyer GLOWWORM stating that she was engaging an enemy force in approximate position 65 06N, 6-20E. After GLOWWORM's last signal, which faded out, the CinC thought it probable that she had been sunk.

(In fact the GLOWWORM had been sunk by the German heavy cruiser HIPPER in position 64-13N, 06-28E)

At 0915 hours in approximate position 61-07N, 1-00E the CinC detached the REPULSE, PENELOPE and destroyers BEDOUIN, KIMBERLEY, PUNJABI and ESKIMO to proceed at their best speed to go to the assistance of GLOWWORM.

At 1200 hours the CinC HF ordered the accompanying RAF Sunderland of 201 Sqd. to proceed ahead of the Fleet and search for the enemy.

At 1429 hours the CinC received the Sunderland's report timed at 1400 hours of one battlecruiser, two cruisers and two destroyers in position 64-12N, 06-25E, course 270¼.

(The Sunderland had momentarily sighted, through clouds of rain, the Trondheim invasion group headed by the heavy cruiser HIPPER. When sighted the group were sailing westerly to kill time so as to arrived at Trondheim at their appointed hour. The westerly course of this group therefore had no significance, but to the CinC HF it was most significant and he determined to intercept)

At 1600 hours when in approximate position 63-06N, 04-30E the Fleet altered course to the north.

At 1615 hours course was altered north westerly.

At 1845 hours RODNEY launched her two Walrus aircraft to attempt to make contact with the enemy force. By this time it was blowing hard from the NNW and speed had to be reduced for the destroyers.

(At 1930 hours, by which time the Fleet should have intercepted the enemy, the CinC HF took stock of the situation. He had had reports from various sources of enemy forces to the north, to the west and of heavy units in the Skaw proceeding westward. The CinC decided to send REPULSE and her screen to reinforce RENOWN off Vestfjord and to turn south to try to bring the heavy enemy units reported in the south to action and support the cruisers of CSI who were sweeping north toward the reported heavy units)

At 2000 hours the Fleet were in position 64-22N, 03-40E.

At 2010 hours the Fleet altered course to 195¼ and increased speed to 18 knots.

9th – In the early hours the CinC was joined by the destroyers SOMALI, MATABELE, MASHONA and TARTAR who had sailed from Rosyth at 2330/7/4/40.

(At 0446 hours the CinC HF received Admiralty message timed at 0424 hours, indicating that four German warships were reported entering Oslo Fjord at 0235/9/4/40, five ships were approaching Bergen, at least one at Stavanger and two were at Trondheim. From these reports the Admiralty conclude that the Germans were invading Norway)

At 0620 hours the CinC detached the destroyer TARTAR to RV with the Polish destroyers BLYSKAWICA, BURZA and GROM, the Polish destroyers were steaming north with the light cruisers ARETHUSA and GALATEA, then to RV with convoy HN 25 and escort it to Methil Roads.

(At this time the CinC HF signalled the Admiralty to ask whether there was any intelligence of enemy forces in Bergen, as it was desired to send MANCHESTER and SOUTHAMPTON and six destroyers there. At 0830 hours the CinC HF received the Admiralty reply stating; no intelligence, but air reconnaissance being carried out. Bergen reported to be in the hands of the enemy and area mined. Submarines ordered to attack enemy forces in Stavanger. The CinC was also instructed by the Admiralty to prepare a plan for attacking German warships and transports in Bergen and for controlling the approaches assuming that the defences were still in Norwegian hands. A similar plan was to be prepared for Trondheim if sufficient forces were available; and Narvik was to be watched to prevent German forces landing)

At 0630 hours in position 61-23N, 03-06E course 180¼, speed 18 knots, the CinC was joined by the cruisers GLASGOW and MANCHESTER of the 18th CS, these cruisers had been covering convoy ON 25.

At 0940 hours in approximate position 60-28N, 03-00E The CinC was joined by the heavy cruisers DEVONSHIRE, BERWICK and YORK of the 1st CS, light cruisers ARETHUSA and GALATEA of the 2nd CS and SOUTHAMPTON of the 18th CS, French light cruiser EMILE BERTIN, destroyers, GURKHA, SIKH, AFRIDI, MOHAWK, and French large destroyers MAILLE BREZE and TARTU. The destroyers ELECTRA, CODRINGTON, GRIFFIN and ESCAPADE rejoined after refuelling at Sullom Voe.

(Four of the destroyers that had been with the 2nd CS had detached at 0400/9/4/40, when KELVIN and KASHMIR were in collision and COSSACK and ZULU were ordered to stand by)

(At 1015 hours The Admiralty gave approval to the CinC HF to carry out the operation against enemy forces at Bergen)

At 1130 hours the CinC HF detached SOUTHAMPTON, MANCHESTER (CS18), SHEFFIELD and GLASGOW of the 18th CS with destroyers AFRIDI (D4), GURKHA, SIKH, MOHAWK, SOMALI (D6), MATABELE and MASHONA for a raid on Bergen.

At 1200 hours in position 59-44N, 2-57E the Home Fleet turned north.

At 1357 hours the Admiralty ordered the Bergen attack force to set course to return to the Main Fleet which by then had turned north to open the distance between the Fleet and the German land based aircraft.

(From early morning the Luftwaffe had deployed a force of He 115 seaplanes to cover the gap between Bergen and the Orkneys searching for British ships. Without being seen by the British forces they successfully located two of the British forces;: The first one was the Home Fleet to the north west of Bergen, and the second one, was the cruisers and destroyers that had been detached to attack Bergen. Also 0920 hours U 56 sighted the battleships RODNEY and VALIANT southwest of

Stadlandet steering south. With this intelligence the Luftwaffe were able to mount an attack against the Home Fleet.

At 1425 hours when the Bergen attack force was in approximate position 60-00N, 4-10E, sailing north easterly, into heavy weather blowing from the NE, the force was attacked by the leading formation of Ju 88s from KG 30 [these aircraft were part of a large force sent to attack the main Fleet]. The cruisers SOUTHAMPTON and GLASGOW were damaged by near misses. At 1507 hours the commander of the GURKHA became so frustrated by his ships inability, due to the heavy weather, to achieve accurate anti-aircraft fire, that he turned GURKHA so that the wind and sea was astern to give his gunners a more stable platform. In doing so he became isolated and the attacking bombers concentrated on GURKHA and eventually disabled her and she sank at 2045 hours)

Between 1430 and 1740 hours the Fleet consisting of the RODNEY, VALIANT, DEVONSHIRE, BERWICK, YORK, SHEFFIELD, ARETHUSA, GALATEA and destroyers JUPITER, CODRINGTON (D.1), GRIFFIN, BRAZEN, ESCAPADE and ELECTRA and the French EMILE BERTIN and destroyers MAILLE BREZE and TARTU, was attacked by 47 Ju 88 bombers from KG 30 and 41 He111 bombers from KG 26.

In the attack the RODNEY was hit by a 500Kg AP bomb dropped by a Ju 88 dive bomber from 400ft. The bomb struck on the port side abaft the funnel a ready use ammunition locker deflected the bomb and split the fuse from the explosive. The body then passed through the boat deck hitting a table at which two midshipman were sitting, they had been sent below for safety. The bomb then continued down into an engineering store where it broke up on the 4' thick armoured deck, where its explosive charge caused a fire. Apart from the structural damage and a small fire, the only injuries caused were to Paymaster Midshipman W. R. H. Lapper, Commissioned Gunner F. G. Roper, Midshipman J. C. S. Wright, and seven ratings. The damage to the armoured deck and other structural damage was repaired by the ships staff who welded steel plates over the holes and RODNEY remained in action with the Fleet

In this attack the Fleet fired off 40% of their AA ammunition and only managed to shoot down four of the attacking Ju 88's.

(This air attack made such an impression on Admiral Forbes that he decided the fleet could not operate without air superiority. Consequently, he proposed to the Admiralty an important change of plans: He would attack the Germans in the northern part of Norway with surface ships and military assistance, but the area to the south would have to be left to British submarines on account of the German air superiority in that area)

At 2030 hours in approximate position 61-50N, 3-00E the Fleet turned west to place distance between it and the Luftwaffe.

10th – Between 0000hours and 0315 hours, when the Fleet was in approximate position 61 50N, 01-00W the CinC HF detached SHEFFIELD, ARETHUSA, GALATEA and destroyers AFRIDI, SIKH, MOHAWK, SOMALI, MATABELE and MASHONA, JUPITER, CODRINGTON, GRIFFIN, BRAZEN, ESCAPADE and ELECTRA and French destroyers MAILLE BREZE and TARTU to refuel either at Sullom Voe or Scapa Flow.

At 0215 hours the CinC was joined by the destroyers FAULKNOR (D.8), FOXHOUND and FORESTER from Scapa Flow.

At 0500 hours the destroyers COSSACK and ZULU joined from Lerwick.

At 0530 hours the destroyers HERO and HYPERION joined from Sullom Voe.

At 0730 hours in position 61-24N, 2-00W, RODNEY, VALIANT, DEVONSHIRE, BERWICK, YORK, FAULKNOR (D.8), FOXHOUND and FORESTER were joined by the battleship WARSPITE, the aircraft carrier FURIOUS and their destroyer screen of ASHANTI, MAORI, ECLIPSE, ESCORT, ISIS, ILEX, IMOGEN, INGLEFIELD, JANUS, JAVELIN and JUNO.

At 0800 hours the Fleet changed course to north easterly to achieve a flying off position for FURIOUS's Swordfish to attack Trondheim.

At 2035 hours the CinC HF received Admiralty message timed at 1904 hours which laid down future policy, viz; The capture of Narvik was to take priority over operations against Bergen and Trondheim.

11th - At 0400 hours in position 64-24N, 7-55E off Trondheim FURIOUS launched 18 torpedo carrying Swordfish, 9 from 816 and 9 from 818 squadrons, against shipping in the harbour. No hits were obtained. All the aircraft returned between 0630 and 0700 hours.

The Fleet then set course for the Lofoten Islands.

At 1448 hours ASHANTI and MAORI were detached to Sullom Voe for refuelling.

At 1500 hours DEVONSHIRE, BERWICK, INGLEFIELD, ISIS, ILEX and IMOGEN were detached to carry out a search of the Inner Leads from Trondheim to latitude 66-17N.

From 1540 to 1700 hours the Fleet was bombed by German aircraft, during the attack, at 1700 hours, the ECLIPSE was hit and her engine room flooded.

The YORK, ESCORT and HYPERION were detached to stand by ECLIPSE. Eventually ECLIPSE was taken in tow by ESCORT the tow was later handed over to YORK who then towed ECLIPSE to Lerwick, screened by ESCORT and HYPERION.

At 1607 hours the Admiralty informed the CinC HF, that there was reason to suspect that certain enemy units were going to affect a RV in latitude 67N between longitude 4-30E and 6E, at sometime between 2000/11/4/40 and 2200/12/4/40.

At 1700 hours the Fleet was in position 64-48N, 7-52E.

At 1709 hours the CinC asked the Vice admiral Commanding the Battle Cruiser Squadron when he could reach the position. He replied that he was in position 67-50N, 8-11E steering 235¼ at 24knots. He was therefore well placed to intercept any enemy.

At 2000 hours the Fleet was in approximate position 65-40N, 8-15E, proceeding north to attack Narvik. Following receipt of the message the Fleet changed course to north easterly to close the position given in the Admiralty message.

12th – At 0730 hours in position 66-27N, 6-00E the Home Fleet and the Battle Cruiser Squadron RVed with the Flag, without either force having intercepted any enemy. The Home Fleet now comprised battleships RODNEY (Flag CinC HF), VALIANT and WARSPITE, battlecruisers RENOWN (Flag CinC BCS) and REPULSE aircraft carrier FURIOUS and destroyers ASHANTI, COSSACK, ZULU, MAORI, HERO, JANUS, JAVELIN, JUNO, FORESTER, FOXHOUND and FAULKNER (D8). The Fleet then steered in a north easterly direction.

At 11220 hours the CinC HF received Admiralty message timed at 1033 hours, stating; An operation to clean up enemy naval forces and destroy shore batteries in Narvik is to be carried out using synchronized dive-bombing attacks from FURIOUS in combination with attack by surface forces. It is considered that the latter should consist of a battleship heavily escorted by destroyers. On completion of the operation, FURIOUS is to remain in Narvik area to assist coming land operation. Fuel for FURIOUS is being sent. Risk of U-Boat attack should be alright if suitable anchorage is selected with destroyer patrol outside.

At 1450 hours VALIANT, REPULSE, JANUS, JAVELIN and JUNO were detached to make contact with troop convoy NP 1.

Between 1615 and 1655 hours FURIOUS flew off 17 Swordfish, 9 from 816 squadron and 8 from 818 squadron armed with bombs to attack enemy shipping in Narvik.

At 2000 hours Vice Admiral Whitworth transferred his flag from RENOWN to WARSPITE. This was in preparation for Operation DW, the attack on Narvik.

At 2205 hours one of the last aircraft of 816 Sqd. returning in pitch darkness, missed the arrestor wires, catapulted overboard, and landed upside down in the freezing Arctic waters. After 45 minutes the three man crew were rescued by HERO.

At 2300 hours the cruisers DEVONSHIRE and BERWICK rejoined the CinC.

(DEVONSHIRE and BERWICK's escorting destroyers INGLEFIELD, ISIS, ILEX and IMOGEN had detached in Vestfjord and proceeded to Skjelfjord to refuel from the oiler BRITISH LADY)

13th – At 0330 hours in approximate position 68N, 11-30E WARSPITE with destroyers COSSACK, HERO, FORESTER and FOXHOUND detached from the Home Fleet and steered for position 67-44N, 13-22E to RV with destroyers BEDOUIN, ESKIMO, ICARUS, KIMBERLEY and PUNJABI, then to proceed on Operation DW.

At 0400 hours destroyers HOSTILE and IVANHOE detached and followed WARSPITE and her destroyers into Vestfjord.

RODNEY, RENOWN, FURIOUS, DEVONSHIRE and BERWICK and destroyers HAVOCK and ESK patrolled off the Lofoten Islands.

At 1058 hours off Tranoy Lighthouse ESKIMO sighted U 48 on the surface and drove her under and carried out a depth charge attack.

At 1115 hours the destroyers HAVOCK and ESK were detached to join HOSTILE and IVANHOE to hunt U 48.

At 1220 hours FURIOUS launched a striking force of ten Swordfish, 6 from 816 and 4 from 818 Sqds to assist operation DW by bombing the coast defences on Baroy Island and at Ramnes Point. When no defences were found at these locations bombing attacks were carried out on enemy destroyers without result. Two aircraft from 818 Sqd were lost.

At 2300 hours DEVONSHIRE and BERWICK detached from the CinC and proceeded north to sweep for German shipping.

14th - RODNEY, RENOWN and FURIOUS patrolled off the Lofoten Islands. Aircraft from FURIOUS carried out a reconnaissance of the area from Narvik to Tromso.

15th – At 0400 hours destroyers ILEX and ISIS joined the CinC off the Lofoten Islands. Following which FURIOUS detached with ILEX and ISIS and proceeded north for operations off Tromso.

At 1700 hours in approximate position 67-30N, 11E, RODNEY, RENOWN and destroyers ESK, ICARUS and IVANHOE, RVed with WARSPITE and destroyers GREYHOUND, HAVOCK, HOSTILE, HERO, FORESTER and KIMBERLEY.

After redistributing the destroyer screens, RODNEY, RENOWN and destroyers ESK, ICARUS, IVANHOE, GREYHOUND, FORESTER and KIMBERLEY set course for Scapa.

17th – At 1000 hours when in approximate position 59N, 4W, the CinC HF received a signal informing him the heavy cruiser SUFFOLK was under attack from the Luftwaffe off the Norwegian coast.

RENOWN with the destroyers FORESTER and KIMBERLEY were immediately detached and preceded through the Fair Isle Channel to SUFFOLK's aid.

At 1200 hours RODNEY and destroyers ESK, ICARUS, IVANHOE and GREYHOUND, who had been damaged by heavy weather and sustained structural damage en route, arrived back at Scapa Flow.

RODNEY remained at Scapa Flow for the remainder of April.

May

RODNEY (Flag CinC Home Fleet) at Scapa Flow for the whole month.

2nd – At 2100 hours the cruiser SHEFFIELD arrived at Scapa Flow with the survivors of the 1/5 Battalion The Leicestershire Regiment who she had evacuated from Aandalsnes. Following SHEFFIELD's arrival the survivors were transferred to RODNEY for the night.

3rd – In the morning the survivors were transferred from RODNEY to the Polish liner MV SOBIESKI.

17th – At 0014 hours the CinC Home Fleet received the following message from the Admiralty:

(Reference Admiralty's 1857/16. The chance of attack on Shetlands by parachute troops and troop-carrying aircraft with possibly subsequent landing by surface craft is sufficiently real to justify increased precautions. You should make such adjustments as you consider to be necessary for the development of land and air forces at your disposal to guard against this eventuality, the necessity for denying Lerwick and the aerodrome to the enemy ships being most important. Three naval 4-inch QF guns mounted on baulk platforms and two 3.7-inch howitzers are being despatched at very earliest opportunity. Military reinforcements are also being sent)

The reinforcements and guns were sent up during the next few days, but in the interim the Vice-Admiral Commanding Orkneys and Shetland stationed the destroyer ATHERSTONE, when not at sea, at Lerwick as a precautionary measure)

18th – Because of concerns about invasion the Admiralty felt the CinC Home Fleet must ensure that the heavy ships did not become immobilised through lack destroyers.

At 1000 hours the CinC Home Fleet instructed the Rear Admiral (D) as follows:

(A screen of nine destroyers is to be provided for the heavy ships. This is from now on to take priority over all other destroyer commitments except by my special permission)

June

5th – At 0645 hours RODNEY with destroyers ZULU, MAORI and FOXHOUND sailed from Scapa Flow to carry out heavy calibre firing practice off Cape Wrath.

At 1800 hours RODNEY, ZULU, MAORI and FOXHOUND arrived back at Scapa Flow.

9th - *(At 0938 hours the CinC Home Fleet received a report from the VALIANT to the effect that she had met the hospital ship ATLANTIS and that the latter had reported sighting an attack by enemy pocket battleship [it was actually the cruiser ADMIRAL HIPPER operating with the battlecruisers SCHARNHORST and GNEISENAU and engaged on Operation Juno] on the empty troop transport SS ORAMA 19840grt in position 67-44N, 03-52E at 0900/8/6/40)*

At 1250 hours RODNEY (Flag CinC Home Fleet), RENOWN and destroyers ZULU, KELVIN, INGLEFIELD (D.3), ELECTRA and ESCORT sailed from Scapa Flow steering for position 66N, 00E to cover all slow convoys returning

from Norway.

(At the time of the CinC Home Fleet sailing the German battlecruisers were safely in harbour at Trondheim having, unbeknown at the time to the Admiralty, sunk the aircraft carrier GLORIOUS and destroyers ACASTA and ARDENT. The SCHARNHORST having been damaged by a torpedo hit on her port bow fired by ACASTA. The Admiralty became aware of the sinkings from a German broadcast at 1615/9/6/40)

10th - *(At 0846 hours a RAF Blenheim of 254 Sqd from Sumburgh on reconnaissance over Trondheim reported sighting 4 enemy cruisers; this was subsequently amended to a battlecruiser and a large transport and 7 destroyers patrolling off the fiord entrance)*

At 1525 hours in position 66-40N, 2-30W the CinC's force RVED with ARK ROYAL and her escorting destroyers ASHANTI, HIGHLANDER and MASHONA. The Home Fleet then steered in a generally eastward direction until midnight.

11th – At 0000 hours the Home Fleet turned on to a north westerly course.
At 0900 hours the Home Fleet turned on to a southerly course covering the last of the convoys.

(RAF Blenheims from 254 Sqd maintained reconnaissance over Trondheim keeping the CinC informed of the situation in the port. The RAF also carried out a bombing attack with 12 Hudsons of 269 Sqd from Wick 36 x 250lb AP bombs were dropped but no hits were scored)

12th – At 0630 hours the destroyers AMAZON, ANTELOPE, ESCAPADE and FEARLESS joined the CinC. The destroyers ACHERON, DIANA and HIGHLANDER detached for Scapa.
At 0935 hours the Home Fleet turned on to course 080¼ to close the Norwegian coast to launch an air strike against enemy shipping at Trondheim.

13th – At 0000 hours the Home Fleet reached position 64-58N, 04-38E.
At 0030 hours the ARK ROYAL flew off a strike force of 15 Skuas, 6 from 800 Sqd and 9 from 803 Sqd, each armed with one 500lb SAP bomb.

(The dive bombing attack by the Skuas was to be supported by an attack on Vaernes airfield by 4 RAF Beauforts of 22 Sqd. Unfortunately the Beaufort attack, instead of suppressing the Luftwaffe, alerted them, causing the launch of Me 109 and 110 fighters. Also the plan called for RAF Blenheim fighters to provide cover over the target.

At 0145 hours the 15 Skuas arrived over the SCHARNHORST, who was ready and waiting having been alerted when the Skuas crossed the coast 20 minutes earlier. 800 Sqd attacked stern to bow and 803 Sqd attacked bow to stern. One hit was achieved, which failed to explode, returning pilots reported two hits. In the attack 8 Skuas were shot down. The RAF Blenheims arrived late and played no part in the operation.

At 0345 hours in thick fog the 7 remaining Skuas had been recovered and the Home Fleet steered west away from the coast to avoid the expected Luftwaffe counter attack which failed to materialise)

At 1000 hours in thick fog destroyers ELECTRA and ANTELOPE collided while escorting ARK ROYAL. ZULU took ELECTRA in tow and INGLEFIELD stood by ANTELOPE.
At 1800 hours destroyers ASHANTI, BEDOUIN, MAORI and TARTAR joined the CinC.

14th - The retirement of the two damaged destroyers was covered by RODNEY, RENOWN, TARTAR, FEARLESS, ASHANTI, BEDOUIN, MASHONA and MAORI.

15th – At 1640 hours RODNEY, RENOWN, TARTAR, FEARLESS, ASHANTI, BEDOUIN, MASHONA and MAORI arrived at Scapa Flow.

(19/6/40 the Swedish destroyers PUKE Commodore T. Hagman RSN, ex-Italian GIOVANNI NICOTERA and PSILANDER, ex-Italian BETTINO RICASOLI and torpedo boats ROMULUS, ex-Italian SPICA and REMUS, ex-Italian ASTORE, en route to Sweden from Italy, arrived at Skaalefjord in the Faroes. They were accompanied by the depot ship PATRICA, ex-Italian PATRIS II.

1930/19/40 destroyers TARTAR [D.6], MASHONA, MAORI, departed Scapa Flow and arrived at Skaalefjord in the Faroes early morning on the 20th to requisition the Swedish warships. Finally on

30/6/40 the destroyers were returned to the control of their crews)

22nd – Steaming parties drawn from the crews of the battleships RODNEY and VALIANT were embarked on the accommodation ship ST MAGNUS (1312grt) and escorted by anti-submarine whalers BUTTERMERE and WINDERMERE, sailed from Kirkwall for Skaalefjord, the Faeroes. The steaming parties were to man the requisitioned Swedish destroyers PSILANDER and ROMOLUS.

July

3rd – At 2200 hours RODNEY, heavy cruiser NORFOLK, light cruiser SOUTHAMPTON, anti-aircraft cruiser COVENTRY, and all available destroyers at Scapa Flow were put at two hours notice for steam until 0500/3/7/40.

4th – On board RODNEY in Scapa Flow a conference was held to discuss the re-routing of convoys from the Western Approaches to the North Western Approaches, his following the German occupation of France. Minelaying strategy was also discussed.

RODNEY remained at Scapa Flow for the remainder of July.

August

23rd – At 0640 hours RODNEY departed Scapa Flow escorted by destroyers INGLEFIELD, ECHO, ESCAPADE and JAVELIN. At 2110 hours RODNEY and escort arrived at Rosyth. RODNEY to dock for a refit and to give leave. RODNEY was at Rosyth for the remainder of the month. During the docking a Radar Type 79Z was fitted in place of prototype Type79Y that had been fitted in 1938.

September

At Rosyth under going refit.

11th – On this day RODNEY was due to leave Rosyth, but was ordered by the Admiralty to remain there.

(In the early morning of 13/9/40 the CinC Home Fleet, was informed by the Admiralty that all evidence pointed to an attempted invasion on a large scale being imminent, and that the SCHARNHORST, GNEISENAU and BISMARCK, and the two old battleships and one pocket battleship might be used by the enemy. In consequence the NELSON, Flag CinC HF, and HOOD were ordered to Rosyth to join the RODNEY)

For the remainder of September RODNEY was held at Rosyth for the interception of any attempt by major German warships attempting to enter English Channel or take passage for attacks on Atlantic shipping.

October

During October RODNEY continued to be stationed at Rosyth in readiness for the interception of any attempt by major German warships attempting to enter English Channel or take passage for attacks on Atlantic shipping.

November

4th – At 1615 hours the Battleships NELSON (Flag CinC HF) and RODNEY, anti-aircraft cruisers NAIAD (CS15) and BONAVENTURE and destroyers COSSACK (D4), MAORI, MATABELE, ELECTRA and BRILLIANT sailed from Rosyth.

At 1730 hours in the Firth of Forth the Fleet was joined by the destroyer PUNJABI from Scapa. The Fleet then set course for the west of the Orkneys to carry out a full calibre practice.

5th – At 1530 hours the Fleet arrived at Scapa Flow.

(At 1730/5/11/40 in position 52.41N, 32.17W the German Pocket Battleship ADMIRAL SCHEER attacked the Armed Merchant Cruiser JERVIS BAY which was the sole escort of convoy HX 84 of thirty seven ships. JERVIS BAY was sunk in 22 minutes)

6th - At 0700 hours NELSON (Flag CinC Home Fleet), RODNEY, light cruiser SOUTHAMPTON and destroyers COSSACK (D4), MAORI, BRILLIANT, DOUGLAS, KEPPEL and VIMY sailed from Scapa Flow to cover the Iceland-Faroes Channel against a possible return to Germany by the SCHEER.

7th - RODNEY detached to join the escort of convoy SC 11.

At 1511 hours in approximate position 59-30N, 18-30W a U-Boat transmitted a W/T signal and probably reported the

RODNEY who at that time was in the vicinity.

12th – In approximate position 48N, 50W the RODNEY joined the escort of convoy SC 11.

15th – In approximate position 52-30N, 43W RODNEY detached from convoy SC 11 and set course to provide cover for convoys HX 85/1 and HX 86.

21st – At 1830 hours In position 61N, 25W RODNEY set course for Scapa Flow.

22nd – At 1030 hours in position 60N, 17W RODNEY was met by destroyers BRILLIANT, BEAGLE, BULLDOG and ELECTRA who then escorted her to Scapa Flow. Shortly after making the RV destroyer BULLDOG lost contact and proceeded independently to Scapa Flow.

23rd - At 1400 hours RODNEY arrived at Scapa Flow.

December

(At 0122/5/12/40 the Admiralty signalled the CinC Home Fleet, to send a capital ship as soon as practicable to cover the incoming Halifax convoys. The RODNEY was chosen for this duty)

5th – At 0830 hours RODNEY with destroyers ESCAPADE, SIKH, BRILLIANT and BEAGLE departed Scapa Flow and headed west for position 60N, 25W.

6th – At 0300 hours in approximate position 60N, 12W the destroyer BEAGLE suffered a failure of her steering gear and had to detach and return to Scapa Flow. The SIKH also detached and escorted BEAGLE back to Scapa Flow.

7th – At 1500 hours arrived at position 60N, 25W, ESCAPADE and BRILLIANT detached and returned to Scapa Flow. RODNEY continued in a westerly direction searching for convoy HX 92. During the day the weather worsened until it became a full westerly gale. In the severe weather RODNEY suffered major structural damage forward causing fractured frames and stringers and splitting of her outer bottom plates. Flooding of compartments due to panting of plates was also experienced making necessary extempore pumping which affected the watertight integrity of her forward structure.

9th – At 1050 hours in approximate position 59-20N, 27W RODNEY made a RV with the AMC MONTCLARE who was the ocean escort of convoy HX 92, at this time the convoy had been scattered due to the severe weather and MONTCLARE was in the process of re-assembling the convoy. At 1030 hours MONTCLARE detached and returned west.

11th – At 1300 hours in position 57-27N, 33- 49W RODNEY joined convoy HX 93 and took over as ocean escort. When handing over to RODNEY, visibility was poor and only 19 ships could be seen, but 25 ships had been in company at sunset the previous day. Following the hand over the AMC AURANIA detached and set course south westerly to search for the destroyer HMCS ST CROIX.

13th – At 1030 hours RODNEY detached from HX 93 and was joined by the destroyers ESCAPADE, ELECTRA and BULLDOG from Scapa. RODNEY, ESCAPADE, ELECTRA and BULLDOG then set course to return to Scapa.

14th – In the early hours the destroyer MATABELE joined the force.

(MATABELE had sailed from Scapa in company with destroyers ESCAPADE, ELECTRA and BULLDOG. But at 2130/11/12/40 in approximate position 59-12N. 8-17W she had detached to go the aid the SS TOWA 5,419 grt. TOWA had been in convoy HX 92 but at 2052 hours she had been torpedoed by U 96 stopped. MATABELE picked up 19 survivors from the crew of 37)

15th – At 1300 hours RODNEY and destroyers MATABELE, ESCAPADE, ELECTRA, BULLDOG arrived at Scapa Flow.

16th – At 2130 hours RODNEY and destroyers ESCAPADE, ELECTRA and ECLIPSE sailed from Scapa Flow for Rosyth.

17th – At 1145 hours RODNEY and destroyers ESCAPADE, ELECTRA and ECLIPSE arrived at Rosyth.

18th - RODNEY was docked for repair of her weather damage. Additional stiffening was fitted in the damaged areas.

1941

January

Under repair at Rosyth.

14th - RODNEY, with destroyers ECHO, ELECTRA and KEPPEL, arrived back at Scapa Flow after repairing weather damage at Rosyth.

25th – At 2320 hours battleships NELSON (Flag CinC Home Fleet) and RODNEY, battle cruiser REPULSE, light cruisers ARETHUSA, GALATEA, AURORA of the 2nd CS, MAURITIUS, NAIAD, PHOEBE of the 15th CS, EDINBURGH and BIRMINGHAM of the 18th CS, with destroyers BEDOUIN (T/D.6) MATABELE, TARTAR, PUNJABI, ESCAPADE, ECHO, ELECTRA, BEAGLE, BRILLIANT, KEPPEL and ORP PIORUN sailed from Scapa Flow for position 61-30N, 17-30W to cover the Denmark Strait and the Iceland-Faeroes passage.

(This deployment resulted from an Admiralty message at 1152/25/1/41 giving information of a D/F bearing of an enemy unit between Rockall and the Hebrides. Followed by an Admiralty message at 1751/25/1/41 giving information from the British Naval Attache at Stockholm that two heavy ships believed to be the SCHARNHORST and GNEISENAU had passed through the Great Belt northwards during the forenoon of 23/1/41.

The vessels sighted were indeed the SCHARNHORST and GNEISENAU, commencing Operation BERLIN, and they passed Utsira Island, 59-18N, 4-53E, northbound at 0300/26/1/41 intending to breakout into the Atlantic through the Iceland-Faeroes passage)

27th – At 1200 hours the Fleet was in position 62N, 21-30W, there having been no further news of the enemy the CinC Home Fleet ordered the EDINBURGH (Flag VA 18thCS) to take the RODNEY, BIRMINGHAM, MAURITIUS, BEAGLE, BRILLIANT, KEPPEL and PIORUN under command and return to Scapa Flow. The CinC Home Fleet with the remainder of the Fleet patrolled in the vicinity of the above position.

28th – At 2345 hours RODNEY, EDINBURGH, BIRMINGHAM, MAURITIUS, BEAGLE and BRILLIANT arrived back at Scapa Flow.

February

4th – At 2105 hours RODNEY and destroyers INGLEFIELD, ELECTRA, ECHO and BRILLIANT sailed from Scapa Flow and set course west then north westerly.

(The deployment was to provide heavy cover for the 1st Minelaying Squadron, comprising the minelayers SOUTHERN PRINCE, AGAMEMNON, MENESTHEUS and PORT QUEBEC escorted by the cruiser NIGERIA and destroyers BRIGHTON, LANCASTER, ST ALBANS, CHARLESTOWN who were to lay minefield SN 7A in the Iceland, Faeroes gap. The lay of 1110 mines was completed early on 6/2/41)

7th – At 1530 hours RODNEY, light cruiser NIGERIA and destroyers INGLEFIELD, ECHO, ELECTRA and BRILLIANT arrived at Scapa Flow.

(At 0618/8/2/41 hours the German battlecruiser SCHARNHORST, who was in company with the GNEISENAU, made radar contact at 17200 metres with convoy HX 106. On closing the convoy SCHARNHORST, at 0947 hours, sighted a battleship, which was the RAMILLIES. On sighting the battleship the Germans broke off.

At 1150Z/8/2/41, the Admiralty received a report from the RAMILLIES, escorting convoy HX 106 in position 52- 55N, 34-00W, some 900 miles west of Slyne Head, had had a brief glimpse of the mast and top of a ship which was possibly a German Hipper class cruiser estimated to be steering a course of 030j. Following the encounter the SCHARNHORST and GNEISENAU headed for refuelling point blue in approximate position 53-55N, 57W, arriving on 14/2/41 and refuelled from the German tankers SCHLETTSTADT (8028grt) and ESSO HAMBURG (9847grt).

The Admiralty appreciation was that the Hipper class cruiser seen in dock at Brest between 2nd January and 1st February had not been located there on 4th February, and if she was the ship seen

by the RAMILLIES she might well have been attempting to return to Germany by the northern passages. At twenty-five knots she could have reached a position by dusk on 9th February to the westward of the Iceland-Faeroes channel appropriate for a night passage through the gap which would have taken her well clear to the eastward by dawn the following day. At twenty knots she would have been too far to the westward before dusk to give a reasonable chance of interception if she attempted a night passage, but she might conveniently be caught to the eastward at daylight. Ships at Scapa were accordingly sailed and disposed to meet either of these contingencies.

At 1947/8/2/41 the Admiralty ordered the cruiser EDINBURGH (CS 18), who was in the Clyde ready to sail with convoy WS 6A, and the destroyers KELLY (D5), KIPLING, KASHMIR and JACKAL from Plymouth, to proceed to Scapa for orders. At 2331/8/2/41 the CinC HF requested that EDINBURGH and the destroyers RV with RODNEY at 1100/10/2/41 in position 64-15N, 9W)

9th – During the forenoon the battleships RODNEY and KING GEORGE V and destroyers INGLEFIELD (D3), BEDOUIN, MAORI, ZULU, BRILLIANT and BOREAS sailed from Scapa Flow for position 65N, 8-30W.

10th – At 1100 hours in position 64-15N, 9W the light cruiser EDINBURGH (CS18) RVed the RODNEY force. At 1640 hours, there having been no further developments, EDINBURGH and the RODNEY force were ordered to return to Scapa.

11th – At 2045 hours RODNEY, KING GEORGE V with destroyers INGLEFIELD, BEDOUIN, ZULU, MAORI, and BRILLIANT arrived at Scapa Flow.

(On the morning of 1/2/41 the German cruiser ADMIRAL HIPPER sailed from Brest on her second raiding mission with orders to join up with the battlecruisers GNEISENAU and SCHARNHORST. At 0440/9/2/41 in position 35-53N, 13-13W the 21 ship convoy HG53, with only the sloop DARTFORD as escort, was attacked by U 37, following the attack U 37 made a sighting report. On receipt of the report Dšnitz sensed an opportunity to mount a combined U boat, air and surface attack on the convoy. Dšnitz ordered U 37 to shadow the convoy and transmit beacon signals. At 1600/9/2/41 in 35 54N, 14 41W 5 FW 200's made a low level bombing attack on HG53 sinking 5 ships. At first the Oberkommando der Marine [OKM] was reluctant to release the ADMIRAL HIPPER, but at 1140/10/2/41 when in approximate position 45N, 30W, ADMIRAL HIPPER was ordered to attack HG53. The ADMIRAL HIPPER missed HG53 but found the 19 unescorted ships of convoy SLS64. At 0925/12/2/41 in position 37-10N, 21 20W, ADMIRAL HIPPER opened fire on the ships of SLS 64 and in 80 minutes she sank 7 and damaged 3. [250 seamen from convoy SLS64 were lost. Their deaths have not been acknowledged in convoy loss statistics as the Admiralty regarded these ships as independents] In the engagement the ADMIRAL HIPPER expended a large amount of ammunition and she set course to return to Brest, arriving on 15/2/41. The Admiralty were aware of HIPPER's arrival at 1115/15/2/41.

A RRR raider report that was picked up at 0930 hours by the SS EGYPTIAN PRINCE in convoy HG 53.

When the Admiralty received the raider report part of their response was the decision to provide close escort for all ocean convoys as far as possible. This would require detachments from the Home Fleet)

12th – At 1830 hours RODNEY and destroyers ECLIPSE, ELECTRA and BRILLIANT sailed from Scapa Flow with orders to proceed at best speed through position 59N, 25W and thence down meridian 25W to join the troop convoy WS 6A.

14th – At 1135 hours RODNEY was signalled by CinC Home Fleet to release her destroyers. At 1145 hours destroyers ECLIPSE, ELECTRA and BRILLIANT detached and proceeded to Skaalefjord to refuel.

15th - At 0700 hours in approximate position 45-30N, 23W, RODNEY RVed with convoy WS 6A. Convoy WS 6A comprised 17 troop transports with almost 23000 troops embarked and 12 MT ships. The convoy was weakly escorted by the cruisers BIRMINGHAM and PHOEBE and the AMC CATHAY. On joining the convoy RODNEY took station 3 miles ahead of the port column. Following which PHOEBE detached to refuel at Gibraltar.

17th – At 0830 hours in approximate position 38-30N, 23W, convoy WS 6A and its escort of RODNEY, BIRMINGHAM and CATHAY was joined by the battle cruiser RENOWN and aircraft carrier ARK ROYAL At 0900 hours RODNEY, ECLIPSE and ELECTRA detached from WS 6A.

18th – RODNEY joined the escort of convoy HX 108 which was a convoy of 50 mercantiles escorted by the corvettes MAYFLOWER and SNOWBERRY. The convoy had sailed from Halifax on 9/2/41.

20th – In position 61-40N, 25W RODNEY detached from HX 108 escorted by destroyers ESKIMO, MATABELE and TARTAR. The destroyers had sailed from Scapa to escort RODNEY back to Scapa.

23rd – At 0300 hours RODNEY and destroyers ESKIMO, MATABELE and TARTAR arrived at Scapa Flow.

March

9th – At 0058 hours the Admiralty signalled the CinC Home Fleet, 'Request you sail 2 battleships in company to Halifax. These ships should be routed so as to afford NORFOLK with HX 112 as much support as possible'.

(This followed the receipt of a signal from the MALAYA stating, 'two German ships, probably the battlecruisers SCHARNHORST and GNEISENAU, sighted at 1600Z/8/3/41 in position 21-37N, 20-21W'. Following their sighting the German ships moved off in a north westerly direction)

At 0740 hours battleships RODNEY and KING GEORGE V escorted by destroyers SOMALI, BEDOUIN, PUNJABI, TARTAR, MATABELE and ESKIMO departed Scapa Flow. They were routed through 59N, 07-30W, 62N, 11W, 62N, 25W, 58N, 30W, and thence to Halifax. RODNEY and KING GEORGE V to provide ocean escort for convoys HX 115 and 116.

10th – At 1946 hours the Admiralty signalled the RA Halifax and RODNEY, 'as RAMILLIES will not be available for HX 114 or 115, RODNEY is to join and escort convoy HX 114 from approximately 49W, joining about 1200/15/3/41'.

11th – At 1130Z hours in position 62N, 25W destroyers SOMALI, BEDOUIN, PUNJABI, TARTAR, MATABELE and ESKIMO detached and returned to Scapa Flow.

12th – At 1945Z hours RODNEY signalled the Admiralty, 'that owing to high speed necessary on outward voyage will not have sufficient fuel to return to Scapa without refuelling at Reykjavik'.

13th – At 0200Z hours KING GEORGE V was detached, in accordance with Admiralty instructions, to proceed with despatch towards Halifax or estimated position of warship raider should any further information be received.

(This signal followed the receipt by Canso Radio, Nova Scotia, of weak signals from two unknown ships being attacked by a warship raider)

15th – At 1000Z-3 hours in position 42-55N, 49W, RODNEY joined the AMC CHITRAL escorting the 27 ships in convoy HX 114.

At 1636 hours a raider distress signal was received from the tanker MV SAN CASIMIRO 8046grt, in position 39-58N, 43-19W.

At 1737 hours the Admiralty signalled RODNEY, 'reference SAN CASIMIRO distress signal. Detach one AMC and submarine THUNDERBOLT to search area and protect independently routed ships'. The Admiralty then informed RODNEY that 14 ships of which 10 are tankers are reckoned to be within 150 miles of position of attack.

(After being sighted by the MALAYA, the battlecruisers SCHARNHORST and GNEISENAU moved into the mid Atlantic and joined up with their supply ships the UCKERMARK and the ERMLAND. On the evening of 12/3/41 all four ships commenced sailing in a north westerly direction towards the HX convoy routes. They were spread out in line abreast, in formation from the east, UCKERMARK, GNEISENAU, SCHARNHORST and ERMLAND, spaced so as to cover a path 120 miles wide. On the morning of the 15/3/41, UCKERMARK sighted a ship and when GNEISENAU closed the ship it proved to be the Norwegian tanker MV BIANCA 5684GRT. The BIANCA and the next ship sighted the MV SAN CASIMIRO were from the dispersed convoy OB 294, which had dispersed on 9/3/41 in position 51-29N, 20-30W. The SCHARNHORST and GNEISENAU then proceeded to capture 3 and sink 12 ships from the dispersed convoy)

16th – At 1800Z-3 hours the battleship ROYAL SOVEREIGN joined the escort of convoy HX 114.

At 2010Z-3 the Danish ship the MV CHILEAN REEFER 1831grt, in position 46-11N, 44-51W transmitted a RRRR raider signal. At the time RODNEY was about 25 miles north east of the attack position, almost immediately the raider opened fire and hit the CHILEAN REEFER setting her on fire.

RODNEY steered 150¼ towards the scene and at 2030 hours, in position 46-16N, 45-08W, she sighted an unknown ship, this was the UCKERMARK, which immediately made off to the west and was soon lost in the poor light.

At about 2037 hours RODNEY sighted, off her port bow, what she took to be a warship and signalled what ship? The vessel sighted was the GNEISENAU, who replied HMS EMERALD and then made off at speed, working up to 32 knots, to the west. RODNEY attempted to follow but the speed differential was too great and with poor visibility she soon gave up. She then turned back to pick up the 27 survivors of the CHILEAN REEFER.

(At 1710Z-3/16/3/41 the MV CHILEAN REEFER, on passage from Newcastle to St John, New Brunswick, with general cargo, was sailing on a south westerly course, when the masthead lookout sighted a vessel on the port bow, about 12 miles away. The ship was immediately turned away to starboard to bring the unknown vessel astern, and speed increased to the maximum of 14 knots, 13.5 knots was her rated top speed. It was clear that the unknown vessel was endeavouring to intercept, so the distress signal QQQQ to be made by W/T. As soon as W/T silence was broken the unknown vessel opened fire, it was in fact the GNEISENAU, the CHILEAN REEFER signalled RRRR and gave her position. GNEISENAU's first salvo landed 100 yards off the port beam, evasive action was taken and two smoke floats were dropped, one on the port side and one on the starboard side.

At about 1720 hours when the raider seemed within 4in gun range, CHILEAN REEFER opened fire with her poop gun. At about the same time a shell entered the accommodation under the bridge and probably one of the same salvos entered Number two hold causing a fire to break out. It was soon evident that the ship could not be saved and to prevent unnecessary loss of life, fire was ceased and the boats lowered. All the survivors cleared the doomed vessel by 1745 hours. The CHILEAN REEFER now with her forward half well alight but refusing to sink, so the GNEISENAU, now almost stopped, continued to fire at the blazing wreck.

GNEISENAU ordered the lifeboat to lay alongside, which was ignored until the rescue work was incomplete and only after picking up all visible men, six in all, did the survivors comply. Failing light compelled the abandonment of the search for survivors, and the lifeboat then made for the lee side of the GNEISENAU. But to do so it was necessary to cross her bow and when practically ahead of her she got under way, and the lifeboat was swept along at her side. No attention, however, was paid to the survivors by GNEISENAU's crew, as she rapidly increased speed and steered westerly. This was when the RODNEY had been sighted and recognised.

After giving up the chase RODNEY returned at 1945 hours and picked up the 27 survivors. When RODNEY steamed away the CHILEAN REEFER was still burning fiercely)

17th – In the morning the ROYAL SOVEREIGN detached from convoy HX 114.

23rd – At 2200Z-2 hours in position 60N, 27W, destroyers COSSACK (D4), ZULU and MAORI RVed with convoy HX 114. Following which RODNEY escorted by destroyers COSSACK, ZULU and MAORI detached from convoy HX 114 and proceeded to Hvalfjord to refuel.

24th - At 1345Z-2 hours RODNEY and destroyers COSSACK, ZULU and MAORI arrived at Hvalfjord.

25th – At 1030Z-2 hours RODNEY escorted by destroyers COSSACK, ZULU and MAORI sailed from Hvalfjord for Halifax.

26th – At 0630Z-2 hours in approximate position 61-16N, 30W, destroyers COSSACK, ZULU and MAORI detached from RODNEY and returned to Hvalfjord to refuel.

31st – RODNEY arrived at Halifax.

April

RODNEY at Halifax at four hours notice until 4/4/41, making good defects.

7th – Nominated for ocean escort of troop convoy TC 10.

10th – RODNEY and destroyer HMCS ST CROIX, sailed from Halifax escorting troop convoy TC 10. The convoy comprised the liners MV GEORGIC 27759grt, with 2059 troops embarked and the Polish MV BATORY 14287grt, with 1795 troops embarked.

RODNEY had embarked Rear Admiral R L Ghormley USN, Mr James Forrestal, Under Secretary of the USN and 13 American Air Corps Officers. Secretary Forrestal was en route to negotiate the Lend-Lease agreement with the British Government.

11th – The ST CROIX detached and returned to Halifax.

15th – In approximate position 58-50N, 33W, the destroyers HESPERUS, LEGION and the FS LEOPARD joined convoy TC 10 from Iceland.

16th – The FS LEOPARD detached from convoy TC 10. RODNEY, HESPERUS and LEGION were joined by the destroyers ACTIVE, ECHO and ORP GARLAND and PIORUN, from Iceland, escorting convoy TC 10.

18th – At 0500 hours the destroyers ACTIVE and ECHO detached from convoy TC 10 for Scapa Flow.

(Late on the 18/4/41 the Admiralty received a report that the German battleship BISMARCK, two cruisers, cruiser Leipzig class and three destroyers passed the Skaw early morning of 18/4/41 steering north west. This report was false, has at the time the BISMARCK was in the Baltic)

19th – At 0030 hours the Admiralty signalled the RODNEY; ‘On arrival in the Clyde refuel with all despatch and prepare to leave harbour again’.

At 1130 hours RODNEY and destroyers HESPERUS, LEGION, GARLAND and PIORUN with convoy TC 10 arrived off Greenock.

On arrival RODNEY immediately commenced refuelling. She also required an estimated 12 hours work on urgent engine defects.

At 2358 hours RODNEY and destroyers ORP PIORUN and GARLAND and SALADIN departed the Clyde to reach position 60-45N, 14-45W by 0900/21/4/41, so as to be in a blocking position south of the Iceland/Faeroes gap should the BISMARCK attempt breakout via the Iceland/Faeroes passage. The cruiser KENYA was to be stationed to the north of RODNEY in position

20th – In darkness off the mouth of the Clyde RODNEY was in collision with the ASW trawler TOPAZE 608grt. The TOPAZE was sunk with the loss of all 18crew.

At 0700 hours RODNEY was in position 55-40N, 6-45W, course then set at 320¼, 15½ knots.

(At 1130/20/4/41 the Admiralty amended the date on which the German force was reported to have passed the Skaw from the 18th to the 14th April)

At 1530 hours with RODNEY in position 57-20N, 9-24W, the Admiralty ordered RODNEY to return to the Clyde.

21st – At 2229 hours the Admiralty ordered RODNEY to return to the Clyde forthwith.

22nd – At 1105 hours the Admiralty ordered RODNEY to proceed to Scapa with despatch.

23rd – At 0115 hours RODNEY and destroyers ORP PIORUN and GARLAND and SALADIN arrived at Scapa Flow.

May

RODNEY at Scapa Flow. She was suffering from various machinery and boiler defects that were necessary to repair before she could sail to the USA for a refit. One of her engine turbines had recently broken down twice, leaving her with power on only one propeller.

17th – RODNEY escorted by destroyers SOMALI (D6), BEDOUIN and ESKIMO sailed from Scapa Flow for the Clyde.

18th - RODNEY and destroyers SOMALI (D6), BEDOUIN and ESKIMO arrived off Greenock.

On arrival RODNEY took on board the extensive spares and equipment that would be required for her refit in the USA. This included 4000 boiler tubes and 3 x eight-barrelled pompoms which were stowed on top of B gun. There were also crates of spares stowed on the deck. Also stowed below were some of the Elgin Marbles and gold bullion. She also embarked over 500 passengers, including US naval personnel.

21st – The auxiliary minelayer SOUTHERN PRINCE 11447grt escorted by the destroyers BEDOUIN and IMPULSIVE sailed from the Kyle of Lochalsh. The SOUTHERN PRINCE carried equipment for RODNEY's refitting and specialist naval ratings en route to Canada.

22nd – At 1315 hours (Zulu +2 hours) RODNEY and destroyers SOMALI (D6), ESKIMO, TARTAR and MASHONA escorting the HMT BRITANNIC 26943grt sailed from the Clyde. RODNEY and ESKIMO were bound for Boston Navy yard for refits. The BRITANNIC, with military and civilian personal embarked, including 550 RAF

pilot trainees en route to the USA to be trained under the then secret Arnold Scheme, was bound for Halifax.

23rd – At 1200 hours RODNEY, SOMALI (D6), ESKIMO, TARTAR, MASHONA and the HMT BRITANNIC were in approximate position 56-30N, 10W.

(At 1922/23/5/41 AB Alfred Newell the starboard lookout of the heavy cruiser SUFFOLK sighted the BISMARCK at a distance of 7 miles NNE, of SUFFOLK and shortly afterwards, astern of BISMARCK, the PRINZ EUGEN. SUFFOLK's approximate position was 66-44N, 26-45W, BISMARCK's 66 51N, 26 38W. At 1923 hours SUFFOLK made a sighting report, but because of icing of her aerals this was only picked up by the NORFOLK. At 2032 hours the heavy cruiser NORFOLK, who was in company with the SUFFOLK, sent a sighting report, one Battleship, one cruiser in sight' which was picked up by the CinC Home Fleet, Admiral Holland and Admiralty)

When NORFOLK's sighting report was received on board. RODNEY's CO, Captain Frederick H. G. Dalrymple-Hamilton, formed a small committee, consisting of himself, the Commander John Grindle RN, the navigator Lt. Cdr. George Gatacre RAN, the Torpedo Officer Lt. Cdr. Roger Lewis RN and two U.S. military personnel a Captain Coppinger and Lieutenant Commander Joseph H. Wellings USN. They met in the charthouse to discuss the latest signals and events and put forward scenarios based on events as they unfolded. Early on the committee agreed that BISMARCK would head for France.

24th – At 0600 hours RODNEY, SOMALI (D6), ESKIMO, TARTAR, MASHONA and the HMT BRITANNIC were in approximate position 56-30N, 16W.

(At 0601/24/5/41 in approximate position 63-22N, 32-17W the battlecruiser HOOD was sunk by the German battleship BISMARCK. Just before the HOOD blew up and sank BISMARCK was hit on her port side by three 14" shells from the PRINCE OF WALES. One amidships under the armoured belt, a second in her bows [this hit caused her to take on water forward and caused a 9-degree port list and a trim down by the bow of 2 meters. Also since the manifolds for the fuel distribution system were located in one of the flooded compartments, BISMARCK was immediately deprived of the use of more than 1,000 tons of fuel oil that was in the forward oil tank] and the third which passed through a boat. Because of the list BISMARCK's starboard propeller was coming out of the water, BISMARCK's CO, Captain Lindemann ordered counter flooding aft to restore the trim, causing maximum speed to be reduced to 28 knots. After the action the cruiser SUFFOLK reported that BISMARCK had been hit by three shells, but of course this could not be confirmed. BISMARCK was also trailing oil.

At 0801/24/5/41 BISMARCK reported to Group North:-

- 1. Loss of Electric plant No. 4.*
- 2. Port Boiler Room No. 2 is taking water, but can be held. Water in forecastle [BISMARCK took on board 2000 tons of water]*
- 3. Maximum speed 28 knots.*
- 4. Denmark Strait 50 miles of floating mines. Enemy has radar instruments.*
- 5. Intention is to put into St. Nazaire. No losses of personnel.*

However because Bletchley Park at this time was not able to read the naval Enigma none of the above signal was read)

24th – At 1036 hours RODNEY was in approximate position 56-30N, 18W when she received the following signal from the Admiralty: - RODNEY to operate against BISMARCK. If BRITANNIC cannot keep up, leave her behind with 1 destroyer.

The Admiralty ordered RODNEY to steer a course that the Admiralty believed would enable RODNEY to close the BISMARCK. However Dalrymple-Hamilton ignored the order as he believed it to be incorrect as it didn't agree with his decision that BISMARCK was heading for France. Because he wished to maintain radio silence, Dalrymple-Hamilton didn't inform the Admiralty or CinC Home Fleet of his decision.

At 1200 hours RODNEY, SOMALI, TARTAR and MASHONA detached and proceeded on a generally south western course in accordance with the assumption that BISMARCK was heading for France.

After detaching RODNEY worked up to speeds that she had not achieved for many years. Which considering RODNEY had not received any significant mechanical repairs/refurbishment for three years, all recent repairs had been carried out solely to keep her in service. Her boilers were defective and leaking steam and her turbines and prop shafts were worn. RODNEY ploughed on through heavy seas and gradually her three escorting destroyers fell behind.

(At 1840/24/5/41 the BISMARCK emerged from mist on SUFFOLK's starboard beam at a range of 10

miles and heading straight for SUFFOLK. BISMARCK immediately opened fire on SUFFOLK, and fired 7 salvos. This manoeuvre was to allow the PRINZ EUGEN to detach to the south, which she did at 1814 hours. SUFFOLK replied with 9 broadsides, most of which fell short. PRINCE OF WALES came up from astern and fired 12 salvos from 15 miles, following which two of her guns were put out of action.

At 1856 hours BISMARCK broke off the action and turned west then south.

At 1914 hours BISMARCK reported to Seekriegsleitung: - brief fight with King George without results. PRINZ EUGEN released for oiling. Opponent keeps up surveillance.

At 2056 hours BISMARCK reported to Group West and Seekriegsleitung: - shaking off contacts impossible due to enemy radar. Due to fuel shortage will proceed direct to St. Nazaire.

At 2400/24/5/41 BISMARCK was attacked by nine Swordfish of 825 Squadron from the VICTORIOUS armed with 18" torpedoes. Three Fulmars of 800Z Flight followed the Swordfish with orders to observe the attack and then maintain contact at all costs. One torpedo hit was achieved on the starboard side, no significant structural damage was caused, however the shock of the impact caused one casualty. Also the increase in speed and manoeuvring had dislodged the collision mats that had been put over the two shell holes in the bows and she again started to take on water again. BISMARCK had to slow down to 16 knots to reposition the collision mats)

(Following BISMARCK's 2056 signal, to Group West. GC and CS reported to Admiralty OIC that the operational control of BISMARCK had been transferred from Wilhelmshaven to Paris and this was a good sign that she was moving south. OIC didn't pass on this information until late on the 25/5/41)

25th – RODNEY continued on the south westerly course, acting on the intuition of Dalrymple-Hamilton and his committee, with her escorting destroyers trailing some way astern.

(At 0310/25/5/41, BISMARCK's CO, Captain Lindemann having decided that there was a chance that BISMARCK's shadowers could be shaken off, turned to starboard and described a huge arc, passing astern of SUFFOLK.

At 0500 hours BISMARCK settled on a course of 130¼.

Also at 0500 hours SUFFOLK, now to the south of BISMARCK, signalled that she had lost radar contact)

(During the period that SUFFOLK had been in contact, BISMARCK had made 22 signals to Germany. Although GC and CS were unable to read any of BISMARCK's signals until 28/5/41, the Admiralty OIC plotted the bearings of her DFed signals against the positions reported by SUFFOLK. This enabled any DF errors to be analysed which assisted in verifying the accuracy of bearings DFed after SUFFOLK lost contact)

At 0800 hours RODNEY was approximately 350 miles south east of BISMARCK and approximately on BISMARCK's track, although of course Dalrymple-Hamilton didn't know this. Dalrymple-Hamilton now considered that RODNEY was close to BISMARCK's course for France so he slowed, this allowed the destroyers SOMALI, TARTAR and MASHONA, who had dropped astern of RODNEY due to the heavy weather, to close on her.

(Between 0852 and 0928 hours, BISMARCK reported to Group West and Seekriegsleitung:-

Possession of radar equipment by opponent, effective range at least 35,000 meters, adversely affects to the highest degree the operations in the Atlantic. Ships were located in the Strait of Denmark in dense fog and were continuously tracked. Disengagement failed even in favourable weather conditions. Oil replenishment is generally no longer possible, if disengagement of opponent cannot be accomplished with higher speed. Running battle between 20,800 and 18,000 meters. Opponent HOOD concentrates fire on BISMARCK. After five minutes, HOOD is destroyed by an explosion; thereafter, change of target to King George who then turns away in black smoke caused by definitively observed hits. He remains out of sight for several hours. Own munitions expenditure: 93 rounds. Later, King George took on the fight only at extreme distances. BISMARCK received two hits from King George; of those one hit below the side armour belt at sections XIII-XIV. Hit in compartment XX-XXI impaired speed and caused a ¼ bow burying forward and destruction of oil cells. Release of PRINZ EUGEN possible by engagement of cruisers and battleship by BISMARCK. Own EM-2 [radar] instrument prone

to failures, especially during firing.

This signal was DFed by various Y stations who feed their bearings to the Admiralty OIC, who were then able to plot a fairly accurate fix at 55-30N, 30 to 32W.

On the specific orders of the CinC Home Fleet the Admiralty only supplied the bearings and not the fix calculated by the OIC. The staff of the CinC Home Fleet then calculated BISMARCK's position incorrectly at 57N, 30W)

At 1047 hours the CinC Home Fleet Admiral Tovey advised all ships, including RODNEY, to search northwards of BISMARCK's last known position, this order was based on the error in plotting the DFed bearings. Dalrymple-Hamilton realised the error and did not follow believing that the error would be quickly corrected by the Admiralty.

At 1158 hours the Admiralty signalled RODNEY to act on the assumption that BISMARCK was heading to a Bay of Biscay port and also supplied the latest DFed bearing fixes. From these fixes Dalrymple-Hamilton decided that RODNEY was now to the south of BISMARCK's track, so he turned north east and worked up to 21 knots.

At 1428 hours the Admiralty ordered RODNEY to act on the assumption that BISMARCK was proceeding to Norway via the Iceland-Faeroes passage and to conform to the movements of the CinC HF. Why the Admiralty sent this signal remains a mystery since at the time the opinion of the OIC and the Directors of the Plans and Operations Divisions at the Admiralty was that BISMARCK was heading for France. Dalrymple-Hamilton ignored the order.

At 1810 hours Dalrymple-Hamilton decided that BISMARCK was making for Brest.

At 1805 hours the Admiralty signalled RODNEY stating that BISMARCK was making for the west coast of France.

At 1812 hours the Admiralty signalled all ships of the Home Fleet to confirm their 1805 that BISMARCK was definitely heading for the west coast of France (this signal was based on information from the GAF Enigma that GC and CS had been reading for some time).

At 1930 hours RODNEY with the destroyers SOMALI, TARTAR and MASHONA turned on to a south easterly course, conforming to, but north of and astern of the BISMARCK. The CinC Home Fleet in the battleship KING GEORGE V was some distance astern of RODNEY on the same heading.

RODNEY was now on the same approximate course as BISMARCK who was some way ahead to the south east. However Dalrymple-Hamilton, the CinC and the Admiralty were unaware of BISMARCK's actual location.

At 2400 hours the destroyer SOMALI, whose fuel was running low, detached to refuel.

26th - RODNEY with the destroyers TARTAR and MASHONA continued on a south easterly course.

(At 0300 hours a RAF Coastal Command Catalina Mk. 1 [US PBY-5] of 209 squadron took off from Castle Archdale on Lough Erne and flew through the Donegal corridor to commence a search for the BISMARCK. Catalina WQ Z209 was piloted by Flying Officer Dennis Briggs and his co-pilot was Ensign Leonard 'Tuck' Smith USN. The search pattern they were to fly had been selected, with Admiralty approval, by the CinC Coastal Command Air Marshal Sir Frederick Bowhill, who believed the BISMARCK would be steering a more southerly course than that predicted by the Admiralty.

At about 1010 hours Smith who was piloting Z209 at the time sighted the BISMARCK at a bearing of 345¼, definite recognition was not immediately possible due to poor visibility, whilst closing the BISMARCK at 2000 feet to confirm contact, Z209 came under fire from BISMARCK. Biggs sent off the following signal, one battleship bearing 240¼ 5 miles, course 150¼, my position 49-33N, 21-47W. Time of origin 1030/26. The position given for Z209 was 25 miles out)

When Z209's signal was received by RODNEY it was found that BISMARCK was 125 miles to the south west.

(At 1051 hours the CinC HF signaled the Admiralty; Request a check that contact was not RODNEY. The Admiralty confirmed that the sighting was not RODNEY)

(At 1115 hours Swordfish 2H of 810 Sqd, flown by Sub Lieut. Hartley, from ARK ROYAL sighted BISMARCK, but reported her as a cruiser.

At 1122 hours Swordfish 2F of 810 Sqd, flown by Lieut. Callander, from ARK ROYAL sighted the BISMARCK and reported her as battleship and sent an accurate position)

At approximately 1515 hours the CinC in KING GEORGE V caught up with RODNEY, TARTAR and MASHONA. The CinC signalled Dalrymple-Hamilton, what is your maximum speed; Dalrymple-Hamilton replied, 22 knots. This suited the CinC as he wanted to reduce speed to conserve KING GEORGE V fuel which was causing concern. So KING GEORGE V and destroyers TARTAR and MASHONA set off at 22 knots. However despite the best

endeavours' of her engine room staff, RODNEY started to fall behind.

At 1815 hours Dalrymple-Hamilton was forced to signal the CinC; I am afraid that your 22 knots is a bit faster than ours.

(At 1821 hours the CinC signalled the Admiralty and the CinC Force H; unless BISMARCK's speed had been reduced by midnight he would have to return to harbour for lack of fuel; RODNEY could continue until 0800/27)

(At 2050 hours a strike force of 15 torpedo armed Swordfish from ARK ROYAL commenced their attack on the BISMARCK.

By 2100 hours the attack was over. Two possibly three hits were achieved the significant one being the hit on the stern that jammed both rudders at 12¼ to port, following which she carried on turning to port.

At 2115 hours SHEFFIELD, who was in contact with BISMARCK, reported BISMARCK's change of course. When Tovey received the signal, he uttered the deadly insult, 'SHEFFIELD has joined the reciprocal club' – meaning of ships that have steered a course 180j off true. But SHEFFIELD hadn't.

At 2105 hours Lutjens reported to Group West; Square BE 6192. Have sustained torpedo hit aft. [BE 6192 indicated approximate position 47-40N, 14-50W]

At 2115 hours Lutjens reported to Group West; Torpedo hit amidships.

At 2140 hours Lutjens reported to Supreme Command of the Navy (O.K.M.) and Group West; Ship unable to manoeuvre. We will fight to the last shell. Long live the Fuehrer)

When BISMARCK's change of course was confirmed the CinC Home Fleet with KING GEORGE V, RODNEY, TARTAR and MASHONA changed course to the south to close BISMARCK and with a closing speed of 30 knots, there was a chance of action before the light was lost.

At 2235 hours ARK ROYAL reported that a second hit had most probably been obtained aft. Following this report the CinC took the decision to postpone an attack until the morning, when KING GEORGE V and RODNEY would open the engagement from the west. Having made his decision KING GEORGE V, RODNEY, TARTAR and MASHONA turned on to a NNE course.

27th – Early in the morning Dalrymple-Hamilton addressed the crew of RODNEY and informed them the BISMARCK was damaged and that they and KING GEORGE V would engage her at dawn.

(Prior to the engagement the CinC issued orders for RODNEY and KING GEORGE V to manoeuvre independently. Thus he would give the BISMARCK two different targets to think about also he avoided Admiral Holland's error of maintaining too close formation between the HOOD and PRINCE of WALES)

At 0730 hours KING GEORGE V, RODNEY, TARTAR and MASHONA commenced a long slow turn eastwards so as to be in position to open the engagement from the west of BISMARCK. This manoeuvre would place BISMARCK to their east where she would silhouetted against the rising sun.

Sunrise was at 0722 hours and when it came the wind was blowing force 8 to 9 from the north west with a rising sea and swell, visibility was 12 to 13 miles with rain squalls and the cloud base was about 2000 feet.

At 0755 hours Rear Admiral Wake-Walker in NORFOLK sighted KING GEORGE V and RODNEY whilst in sight of BISMARCK and signalled; Enemy bears 130¼ 16 miles.

At 0843 hours RODNEY sighted the BISMARCK at a range of about 24,700 yards.

At 0847 hours RODNEY, sailing at 16 knots, opened fire on the BISMARCK at a range of 23,400 yards. KING GEORGE V opened fire one minute later.

RODNEY fired two types of salvo, the outer guns of A and X plus the inner gun of B in a five gun salvo followed by the inner guns of A and Y and the outer guns of B in a four gun salvo and this is how she initially engaged the German ship. The reason for this pattern of firing was an attempt to limit self inflicted damage from the blast of her own guns.

RODNEY's first two salvos were over, her third was a straddle.

At 0901 hours RODNEY fired her fourth salvo, two shells missed and two were hits. At least one of the shells hit in the vicinity of Bruno turret completely disabling it and partially disabling Anton; also the explosion tore upwards through the bridge killing many on the bridge.

At 0849 hours BISMARCK returned fire from her Anton and Bruno turrets, the only ones that could bear, on RODNEY. The first three salvos were short, straddle and over. One of BISMARCK's shells exploded in the water off the port bow and the force of the explosion jammed her port torpedo tube doors.

At 0854 hours the heavy cruiser NORFOLK opened fire on BISMARCK at a range of 18,000 yards.

At 0916 hours RODNEY fired the first of twelve torpedoes from her starboard tube at the BISMARCK, this was the first time a battleship had fired a torpedo at another battleship. All the torpedoes except possibly one missed.

At 0918 hours RODNEY closed to 8,000 yards.

At 0927 hours BISMARCK fired her last shells from her forward turrets.

At about 0930 hours a 16in shell from RODNEY penetrated BISMARCK's deck armour and exploded in the port engine room killing most of the crew and putting the engine room out of action.

At 0930 hours RODNEY closed to 6,000 yards to compensate for the failure of her fire control equipment.

At 0931 hours a 16in hit from RODNEY hit Dora turret, which was then abandoned by its crew due to smoke and gas. At the same time Caesar turret fired the last of her shells. This hit and the exhausting of ammunition for Caesar turret, ended fire from BISMARCK's after turrets.

At 0940 hours the heavy cruiser DORSETSHIRE opened fire on BISMARCK at a range of 20,000 yards.

(Between 1000 and 1015 hours BISMARCK's crew were setting off scuttling charges that were pre-positioned at strategic locations throughout the ship. Each scuttling charge was in a rectangular white box labelled with a red "V" [abbreviation for "Versenken" = Scuttling]. The boxes contained six dynamite sticks, a timer, and a percussion fuse to be placed on inlet sea valves and condenser inlets when the scuttling order [Measure "V"] was given)

At 1000 hours one of RODNEY's torpedoes was a probable hit.

At 1003 hours RODNEY closed to 4,000 yards.

At 1014 hours RODNEY ceased fire and withdrew in company with KING GEORGE V to the north east both battleships were dangerously low on fuel. During the action the Admiralty had signalled all ships warning that U-Boats were en route to the area, so this was a further reason for the ships to withdraw.

In the action RODNEY fired 380 x 16in AP shells (the AP shells weighed 2053 lbs and were 6 ft 4 inches long) and 716 x 6in shells. Most of the shells had been fired from A and B turrets, as X turret was unable to bear for most of the action. In the action the right hand gun of A turret failed completely and the left and centre guns of B turret suffered intermittent faults.

The blast effects from RODNEY's main armament caused the Douglas fir decking on the upper deck to be ripped up. Also the adoption of aluminium alloys for most of the minor ships fittings, such as kit lockers, mess racks, store cupboards and wash facilities caused all these fittings to be shaken up and some dislodged when the main armament was fired. Cast iron water mains were ruptured and in many instances broke, flooding compartments.

At 1015 hours according to the CinC's Official Dispatch included on ADM 234/509: the BISMARCK was a wreck, without a gun firing, on fire fore and aft and wallowing more heavily every moment. Men could be seen jumping overboard, preferring death by drowning in the stormy sea to the appalling effects of our fire. I was confident that the BISMARCK, could never get back to harbour and that it was only a matter of hours before she would sink.

At 1021 hours KING GEORGE V fired her last salvo from her Y turret.

At this time BISMARCK was a burning hulk, but still afloat.

(As he withdrew the CinC made a signal to ships in company; Any ship with torpedoes to close the BISMARCK and torpedo her. The only ship in contact with torpedoes was the DORSETSHIRE and she had anticipated the CinC's order and was closing BISMARCK to fire torpedoes.

At 1022 hours two 21 inch MK VII torpedoes fired by DORSETSHIRE from 3,280 yards hit BISMARCK's starboard side.

At 1037 hours one 21 inch MK VII torpedoes fired by DORSETSHIRE from 2,400 yards hit BISMARCK's port side, at the time BISMARCK had a heavy list to port.

At 1039 hours BISMARCK sank in approximate position 48-10N, 16-12W.

At 1041 hours DORSETSHIRE signalled the Admiralty that BSMARCK had sunk.

The DORSETSHIRE and MAORI moved in to pick up survivors. They sailed slowly into the mass of humanity in the water. Ropes were thrown over the side for the survivors to climb up, with the assistance of the British seamen. When the DORSETSHIRE had taken on board 86 German sailors,

and the MAORI had picked up a further 25 sailors, there was a submarine alert. The DORSETSHIRE immediately got underway followed by MAORI, leaving hundreds of survivors behind, some still clinging to the ropes along her side before they dropped off.

30/5/41 DORSETSHIRE landed her survivors at Newcastle and the MAORI landed hers at Greenock.

At 2059/27/5/41 U74 rescued 3 survivors.

29/5/41 the trawler SACHSENWAL which was a German weather ship rescued another 2 survivors.

Therefore out of BISMARCK's total complement of 2221 men, there were 116 survivors)

KING GEORGE V, RODNEY and destroyers COSSACK, SIKH and ZULU withdrew to the north.

At 1230 hours they were joined by DORSETSHIRE and MAORI.

29th – At 0300 hours RODNEY with heavy cruiser NORFOLK and destroyers MAORI, SIKH, LEGION and COLUMBIA arrived off Greenock. RODNEY's fuel tanks were virtually empty and she immediately commenced bunkering and replenishing her ammunition and other stores.

June

3rd – At 2200 hours RODNEY with Air Vice Marshal Harris the future head of RAF Bomber Command embarked, in company with the troopship SS WINDSOR CASTLE 19141grt and escorted by the destroyers TARTAR, PUNJABI, ESKIMO and ICARUS sailed from the Clyde for Halifax.

4th – The destroyer ICARUS detached to join the battleship NELSON.

6th – At approximately 1730 hours in position 35W the destroyers TARTAR, PUNJABI and ESKIMO detached and returned to Scapa Flow.

11th – RODNEY and WINDSOR CASTLE arrived at Halifax.
Later in the day RODNEY sailed from Halifax.

12th – At 1100 hours RODNEY arrived at Boston Navy Yard to commence a refit.

July

At Boston Navy yard under refit. Whilst at Boston she had a new commanding officer; Captain James William Rivett-Carnac DSC, RN.



When HMS Rodney was being refitted in Boston in mid-1941, members of the crew were entertained by local families. This image includes Bill Patterson, Louie and Reggie Pope staying with the great grandmother of Deb Cruse - with thanks to Deb, 14 Feb 2012

Dedicated to the many families across the world, including Australian, Canadian, New Zealand, South African and American who shared their homes with the men and women of Royal Navy throughout World War 2

August

At Boston Navy yard under refit.

12th – Refit completed she commenced harbour trials. Followed by sea trials.

20th – RODNEY sailed from Boston for Newport, Rhode Island. At Newport she was degaussed.

22nd – RODNEY sailed from Newport, Rhode Island for Bermuda.

24th – RODNEY arrived at Bermuda to carry out working up exercises.

September

At Bermuda carrying out working up exercises.

15th – RODNEY sailed from Bermuda to RV with convoy WS 11X.

21st – In the morning in approximate position 43-30N, 16W RODNEY joined the escort of convoy WS 11X.

23rd – At approximately 1130 hours in approximate position 36N, 12W RODNEY with destroyers HNethMS ISAAC SWEERS, ORP PIORUN and ORP GARLAND detached from convoy WS 11X for Gibraltar.

24th – At 0900 hours RODNEY and destroyers ISAAC SWEERS, PIORUN and GARLAND arrived at Gibraltar and commenced refuelling.

At 1800 hours Vice Admiral Somerville CinC Force H transferred his flag to RODNEY from the battleship NELSON.

(This was part of a deception to make spies in Spain believe that Force H was remaining at Gibraltar. However although Somerville's flag continued to be flown by RODNEY, Somerville slipped back to the NELSON who then sailed with Somerville on board, but not flying his flag, into the Atlantic)

At 1900 hours ZULU, GURKHA and LANCE arrived at Gibraltar to refuel.

At 2030 hours the RFA oiler MV BROWN RANGER 3,400 grt (nominally capable of 14.5 knots but due to a fouled bottom her maximum speed was 11 knots) escorted by corvette FLEUR DE LYS sailed from Gibraltar to be in position to refuel the destroyers on day 2.

At 2330 hours RODNEY, aircraft carrier ARK ROYAL, light cruiser HERMIONE, and destroyers DUNCAN D13, FORESIGHT, FORESTER, LIVELY, ZULU, GURKHA, LEGION and LANCE departed Gibraltar and sailed east to simulate a normal sortie by Force H but in reality to take part in Operation HALBERD.

(Operation HALBERD was an operation to pass a supply convoy to Malta. The convoy had formed off Orsay, as convoy WS 11X, on 17/9/41 and consisted of CLAN MACDONALD 9,653grt, CLAN FERGUSON 7,347grt, AJAX 7,539grt, IMPERIAL STAR 10,733 grt, CITY OF LINCOLN 8,039grt, ROWALLAN CASTLE 7,798grt, DUNEDIN STAR 11,168grt, CITY OF CALCUTTA 8,063grt and HM supply ship BRECONSHIRE and HM troopships PRINCESS BEATRIX, QUEEN EMMA, ROYAL SCOTSMAN, ULSTER MONARCH and LEINSTER. As the convoy passed through the Straits of Gibraltar, HM troopships PRINCESS BEATRIX, QUEEN EMMA, ROYAL SCOTSMAN, ULSTER MONARCH and LEINSTER detached to Gibraltar. At 0130/25/9/41 the convoy passed south of Europa Point and became convoy GM2)

(24/9/41 late in the evening the Italian battleships LITTORIO flag Admiral Iachino and VITTORIO VENETO with destroyers GRANATIERE, FUCLIERE, BERSAGLIERE, and GIOBERTI of the 13th Destroyer Division and DA RECCO, PESSAGNO, and FOLGORE of the 16th Destroyer Division sailed from Naples and steered south westward to intercept the RODNEY force.

26/9/41 the heavy cruisers TRENTO, TRIESTE, and GORIZIA with destroyers CORAZZIERE, CARABINIERE, ASCARI, and LANCIERE of the 12th Destroyer Division sailed from Messina and steered north, then westward to RV with the light cruisers ABRUZZI and ATTENDOLO with destroyers MAESTRALE, GRECALE, and SCIROCCO of the 10th Destroyer Division who sailed from Palermo to intercept the convoy.

The two battleships and seven destroyers operated as one group. The five cruisers and seven destroyers operated as the second group. The remainder of the Italian Fleet could not sail due to fuel shortages)

25th – 0800 hours in approximate position 36-08N, 3-20W RODNEY, and destroyers DUNCAN, GURKHA, LEGION and LANCE joined battleship PRINCE OF WALES flag of CinC 2BS and 2IC Home Fleet, Vice Admiral Alban Thomas Buckley Curteis, light cruisers KENYA flag CS10 Rear Admiral Harold Martin Burrough, CinC close escort, EDINBURGH flag CS2 Rear Admiral Edward Neville Syfret, SHEFFIELD and EURYALUS and destroyers LIVELY, ORIBI, ISAAC SWEERS, PIORUN, GARLAND, FURY, FARNDALE and HEYTHROP as the close escort, Group 2, for convoy GM2 (Operation HALBARD).

Force H, Group 1, comprising battleship NELSON flag Vice Admiral Sir James Fownes Somerville, ARK ROYAL, HERMIONE and destroyers COSSACK D4, ZULU, FORESIGHT, LAFOREY D19 and LIGHTNING, preceded ahead of convoy GM2; steering a course to the south of the convoy.

At 1000 hours clocks were advanced by one hour.

During the day six Fulmars from ARK ROYAL flew around Groups 1 & 2 for recognition purposes.

26th – Convoy GM2 and escort proceeded north eastward.

At 0650 hours the first two destroyers were detached to refuel from BROWN RANGER. However because of BROWN RANGER's slower than expected speed she was 22 miles to the west of her expected position. This was to cause problems throughout the day and refuelling of Group 2's 12 destroyers was not completed until after dark.

At 0700 hours course was altered to eastward.

At 1200 hours in position 38-31N, 2-32E course was altered to 107¼.

At 2130 hours the destroyers FURY and HEYTHROP rejoined the convoy after refuelling. The ORIBI was the last destroyer to complete refuelling and failed to locate the convoy in the dark, so until morning she joined Group 1 screen.

(During the day Group 1 was ahead to the south eastward and out of sight of the convoy. At 0932 hours lookouts on NELSON sighted a shadowing aircraft, bearing 150¼, 10 miles and flying very low, this aircraft was not detected by radar. At 1048 hours Group 1 sighted the Swiss merchant SS TUNISIAN. At 1537 hours Group 1 was also sighted by two aircraft, though to be RAF Hudson's so they were not intercepted)

27th – At 0720 hours radar indicated that enemy reconnaissance aircraft were in the vicinity of the Force.

At 0800 hours ARK ROYAL flew off four Fulmars

(At 0810 hours an Italian Cant Z 506B reconnaissance aircraft of 287 Squadriglia sighted units of Operation HALBARD west of La Galite Island and sent off the following signal; "position 37-43N, 06-55E, course 90¼, speed 12 nm per hour; 1 battleship, 1 carrier, 4 cruiser, unspecified number of destroyers and steamboats')

At 1000 hours, in expectation of air attacks, Force H, less ARK ROYAL, EURYALUS and HERMIONE who manoeuvred ahead of the convoy, joined the convoy escort.

At 1158 hours radar detected an aircraft bearing 210¼, at 14 miles. LEGION reported this aircraft as an Italian Fiat BR 20. ARK ROYAL's Fulmars failed to shoot it down and a sighting report was subsequently intercepted.

At 1255 hours radar reported two formations at 30 miles and closing, one from the north and one from the east. These were eleven Savoia-Marchetti S 84's torpedo bombers from Decimomannu airfield, north of Cagliari. Severn attacked from the north with top cover of five Fiat CR 42 fighters and four from the east.

At 1259 hours 8 Fulmars of 808 Sqd. attacked the northern group of six S 84's, shooting down one.

The torpedo attack was made against the port wing of the force; this was where RODNEY was stationed.

At 1302 hours an S 84 flown by Capitano Rotolo was shot down either by RODNEY and PRINCE OF WALES; the damaged aircraft collided with his right wingman, Tenente Barro and both crashed into the sea.

At 1300 hours two S 84's targeted RODNEY one flown by Maggiore Arduino Buri of 256 Squadriglia and the other flown by Tenente Piercarlo Amante of 257 Squadriglia. As the two torpedoes were approaching RODNEY made an emergency turn of 60¼ to port and both torpedoes were avoided.

At 1303 hours two destroyers of the port screen were targeted these were the LANCE and ISAAC SWEERS, however the destroyers took evasive action and avoided the torpedoes.

At 1327 hours radar reported another wave of aircraft closing from the east. These were five S 84 torpedo bombers of 258 and 259 Squadriglia, from Decimomannu airfield and they attacked the Force from the starboard side.

At 1330 hours two aircraft flown by Colonnello Seidl and Tenente Tomasino targeted NELSON who was hit by a torpedo (probably Seidl's) on the port bow, the second torpedo missed. As they pulled away both Seidl and Tomasino were shot down by AA fire from the PRINCE OF WALES and SHEFFIELD. The damage to NELSON caused her to immediately reduce speed to 18 knots.

During this action, a Fulmar was shot down by RODNEY, but luckily the crew, Sub-Lieutenant Percy Guy and Leading Airman Jones, were rescued by DUNCAN.

At 1345 hours the Force was attacked by twelve Savoia-Marchetti SM 79's torpedo bombers of 278, 280, 282 and 283 Squadriglia, from Decimomannu airfield, escorted by twelve CR 42's, attacked from the north, south and west. The attackers were met by the Fulmars and intense AA fire, which prevented them from attaining a dropping position.

At 1359 hours a CR 42 flown by Sergente Maggiore Luigi Valiotti of the 354^a Squadriglia, in an attempt to divert the

AA from the torpedo-bombers, began to perform aerobatic manoeuvres over the heads of the starboard wing destroyers, who after a while started to shoot at him. Valiotti avoided their shells for six minutes before being killed when his CR.42 crashed into the sea. However Valiotti's sacrifice was in vain as after several unsuccessful attempts, to penetrate the AA barrage the remaining SM 79,s gave up and returned to base.

At 1404 hours the CinC Force H received an emergency report from aircraft B, a RAF Maryland of 69 Squadron on a reconnaissance flight from Malta, timed at 1340 hours. The signal read, 2 battleships and 8 destroyers in position 38-20N, 10-40E, steering 190¼, speed 20 knots. At the time of receipt NELSON's position was 37-46N, 09-04E, the enemy was therefore 74 miles, bearing 076¼ from NELSON.

At 1408 hours the CinC Force H ordered ARK ROYAL to fly off two Swordfish to take over shadowing duties and to prepare an air strike force.

At 1417 hours the CinC Force H ordered RODNEY and PRINCE OF WALES to form up on NELSON ahead of the convoy.

At 1425 hours the CinC Force H received a further emergency report from aircraft B, timed at 1350 hours. The signal read 4 cruisers and 8 destroyers some 15 miles WSW of the enemy battlefleet and steering same course and speed.

At 1430 hours NELSON was forced to reduce speed to 15 knots to reduce flooding and further damage from her torpedo hit and the CinC Force H ordered Vice Admiral Curteis in PRINCE OF WALES to proceed with PRINCE OF WALES, RODNEY, EDINBURGH, SHEFFIELD and 6 destroyers at best speed to close the enemy. At the same time NELSON took station astern of the convoy.

The surface strike force steered north at their best speed with the two cruisers ahead and working up to 30 knots and PRINCE OF WALES and RODNEY trailing behind.

At 1506 hours a signal was received from the RAF shadowing aircraft, timed at 1445 hours stating that the enemy had reversed course and was now steering 360¼.

At 1540 hours a strike force of 12 Swordfish of 816 and 825 Sqds, escorted by 4 Fulmars of 807 Sqd were launched from ARK ROYAL.

At 1543 hours a further signal was received from the RAF shadowing aircraft, timed at 1503 hours stating that the enemy was now steering 060¼.

At 1658 hours with no news from the Swordfish shadowing aircraft, the RAF Maryland had departed, or the strike force; the CinC Force H ordered Vice Admiral Curteis to return to the convoy.

At 1830 hours PRINCE OF WALES, RODNEY, EDINBURGH, SHEFFIELD and the 6 destroyers rejoined the convoy.

At 1855 hours in approximate position 37-30N, 10-15E, Force A comprising NELSON, PRINCE OF WALES, RODNEY, ARK ROYAL and destroyers DUNCAN, GARLAND, GURKHA, ISAAC SWEERS, LANCE, LEGION, LIVELY and PIORUN detached from the convoy and turned on to 285¼ and proceeded at 14 knots, this being NELSON's best speed.

28th – Force A continued on a westerly course at 14 knots.

At 0725 hours ARK ROYAL flew off a Swordfish A/S patrol and 3 Fulmar fighters.

0958 hours the CinC Force H received a RAF reconnaissance report, timed at 0940 hours stating, 2 enemy battleships, 5 cruisers and 13 destroyers, 70 miles, 105¼ from Cagliari, steering 195¼.

At 2000 hours, it was now dark, in approximate position 37-30N, 03-14E the speed of Force A was reduced to 12 knots to reduce the strain on NELSON's bulkheads and decks.

At 2010 hours PRINCE OF WALES, RODNEY, ARK ROYAL and destroyers GURKHA, ISAAC SWEERS, LANCE, LEGION and LIVELY detached and steered easterly to RV with Force X, the convoy escort, on their return from Malta.

29th – At 0555 hours in position 37-30N, 06-25E the PRINCE OF WALES obtained a surface radar contact ahead. (The contact, though not known at the time, was probably the Italian submarine DIASPRO which was on the surface).

At 0609 hours PRINCE OF WALES, RODNEY, ARK ROYAL and destroyers GURKHA, ISAAC SWEERS, LANCE, LEGION and LIVELY made an emergency turn of 40¼ to port on to course 050¼.

At 1612 hours the GURKHA sighted a torpedo track approaching from a bearing of 330¼, followed by a second one a few seconds later, both torpedoes passed under GURKHA and exploded at 0622 hours at the end of their run. GURKHA and ISAAC SWEERS detached to hunt the submarine, without success, and at 0700 hours they rejoined the screen.

At 1030 hours in approximate position 37-35N, 08-00E PRINCE OF WALES, RODNEY, ARK ROYAL and destroyers GURKHA, ISAAC SWEERS, LANCE, LEGION and LIVELY, RVed with Force X returning from Malta. The combined force then steered west for Gibraltar.

At 1930 hours the PRINCE OF WALES, KENYA, SHEFFIELD and destroyers LAFOREY, LIGHTNING, ORIBI,

FORESIGHT, FORESTER and FURY detached and proceeded ahead. RODNEY, ARK ROYAL, HERMIONE, EDINBURGH, EURYALUS and destroyers FARNDALE, HEYTHROP, COSSACK, LEGION, LANCE, LIVELY, ZULU, ISAAC SWEERS and GURKHA followed astern at a slower speed.

30th – At 0700 hours the RODNEY force commenced entering Gibraltar harbour.

At 0928 hours in position 37-10N, 00-56E GURKHA obtained an echo bearing 240¼, at 2000 yards, which she confirmed as a submarine and at 0933 hours she made a DC attack. GURKHA was joined by LEGION and together they made two further DC attacks. After the last attack at 1009 hours wreckage indicated that a submarine had been sunk. This was the Italian submarine ADUA.

October

1st – At Gibraltar where, due to the damaged NELSON being out of action, RODNEY became the flagship of Force H.

8th – The aircraft carrier ARGUS escorted by the destroyers COSSACK, ZULU and SIKH arrived at Gibraltar with 12 Albacores of 828 Sqd. These aircraft were then transferred to ARK ROYAL in preparation for Operation CALLBOY.

16th – RODNEY Flag CinC Force H, aircraft carrier ARK ROYAL, light cruiser HERMIONE, and destroyers COSSACK, FORESTER, FORESIGHT, FURY, LEGION, SIKH and ZULU departed Gibraltar and headed east on Operation CALLBOY.

(Operation CALLBOY was an operation to supply Malta with a FAA strike force of Albacores and cover the passage of a surface strike force to be known as Force K. This operation came about because in the Summer of 1941 GC&CS [Bletchley Park] had broken the Italian Naval cipher C 38. Therefore full details of Axis convoys to North Africa became known and the strike forces were to be employed to take advantage of this knowledge. Force K comprising the light cruisers AURORA and PENELOPE and destroyers LANCE and LIVELY, departed Gibraltar on 19/10/41 and arrived at Malta on 21/10/41)

18th - At 0140 hours ARK ROYAL flew off 11 ALBACORES of 828 Sqd. and 2 Swordfish to Hal Far airfield Malta.

19th – RODNEY, ARK ROYAL, HERMIONE, and destroyers COSSACK, FORESTER, FORESIGHT, FURY, LEGION, SIKH and ZULU arrived back at Gibraltar.

30th – Whilst at Gibraltar RODNEY was a target of an attack by Italian SLC's (Siluro A Lenta Corsa, translated as low speed torpedo) these were human torpedoes. Also known as Maiale, translated as pigs.

(On 21/10/41 the submarine SCIRE sailed from La Spezia carrying three SLC's and eight crewmen. On 30/10/41 the SCIRE broke through the British patrols, and taking advantage of the strong current, entered the Bay of Algeiras came to rest at a depth of about 45 feet near the estuary of the river Guadarranque, about 3 miles from the northern entrance to Gibraltar harbour. Six members of the 10th Light Flotilla manned the three SLC's and left the submarine, heading for Gibraltar harbour. Two of the SLC's were sighted by patrols and forced to abandon their attacks, the four crew members made it back to Spain. The third team, of Birindelli and Paccagnini, experienced technical problems with both the SLC and their breathing equipment. They almost reached the battleship RODNEY when the SLC lost power. Birindelli attempted to drag the heavy explosive near the target, but exhausted, he had to abandon the mission. Both men were captured)

November

2nd – At 0700 hours RODNEY, with 29 survivors from the COSSACK embarked, escorted by destroyers GURKHA, ZULU, LIGHTNING and ISAAC SWEERS, departed Gibraltar and headed west to RV with aircraft carrier ARGUS and aircraft transport ATHENE, who were escorted by destroyers LAFOREY, HIGHLANDER, HAVELOCK and HARVESTER.

5th – At 1530 hours in position 42N, 20W the RODNEY force RVed with the ARGUS force. The two groups exchanged escorts and RODNEY steered for Scapa Flow escorted by destroyers HIGHLANDER, HAVELOCK and HARVESTER.

(Whist on passage to Iceland, in the KING GEORGE V the CinC Home Fleet received new intelligence from the Admiralty which indicated that a heavy German unit had passed through the Belts late on 2nd November. The indications were that this was the SCHEER and that she was bound the Atlantic, but it was possible that it was the TIRPITZ, or both of them. If this intelligence were true; it was possible for the enemy ships to pass through the Denmark Strait on 5th November, but the Commander in Chief, Home Fleet, considered it most unlikely that she would attempt the passage in daylight: it was also possible that she would use the Iceland-Faeroes passage, in spite of our minefield, or pass through Skopen Fjord, in the Faeroes, and she might just be early enough to make this passage on the night 4th/5th November. All these times were 24 hours earlier than previous intelligence had indicated. The forces at the disposal of the CinC Home Fleet, were insufficient to cover more than one route; after full consideration he decided that the Denmark Strait was the most attractive from the enemy point of view, and decided to concentrate his efforts on this, leaving the Iceland-Faeroes passage to be watched by the trawler and air patrols, covered by the KENYA (Flag CS10) and destroyers BEDOUIN and INTREPID.

At 2100/5/11/41, four hours after arriving at Hvalfjord. Further intelligence was received from the Admiralty, indicating that the SCHEER was still in the Baltic on 4th November. The CinC therefore ordered his force and that of the Flag Officer Commanding 18th CS to return to harbour. The CinC also asked the Admiralty to direct the RODNEY to Loch Ewe to refuel and thence to approximate position 60° N, 22W, to cover the Iceland-Faeroes passage; RODNEY was expected to reach this position during the night of 9th/10th November)

7th – At 1200 hours in position 55N, 12W RODNEY and destroyers HIGHLANDER, HAVELOCK and HARVESTER Rved with destroyers ONSLOW, IMPULSIVE and ANTELOPE from Londonderry. Destroyers HIGHLANDER, HAVELOCK and HARVESTER then detached for Scapa Flow. RODNEY and destroyers ONSLOW, IMPULSIVE and ANTELOPE steered for Loch Ewe.

8th – At 0815 hours RODNEY and destroyers ONSLOW, IMPULSIVE and ANTELOPE arrived at Loch Ewe. On arrival they immediately commenced refuelling.

At 1600 hours RODNEY and destroyers ONSLOW, IMPULSIVE and ANTELOPE sailed from Loch Ewe and steered for position 60N, 22W, thence to patrol the Iceland-Faeroes passage.

11th – At 0144 hours RODNEY and destroyers ONSLOW, IMPULSIVE and ANTELOPE were ordered to abandon their patrol and proceed to Hvalfjord.

12th - RODNEY and destroyers ONSLOW, IMPULSIVE and ANTELOPE arrived at Hvalfjord.

December

(The entry of Japan into the war, on 7/12/41, increased the importance of preventing a break-out. For the German Navy could do no better service to their new allies than to send out their heavy ships for an intense attack on our trade routes. The effects on our naval strategy of such a move could not be exaggerated. The heavy American losses in the opening attack, on Pearl Harbour led, on 9/12/41 to the withdrawal of the two US battleships stationed at Hvalfjord, and were closely followed-by the loss of the PRINCE OF WALES and REPULSE.

The DUKE OF YORK, which had not yet finished working up, was withdrawn from the Home Fleet on 11/12/41 together with a screen of three destroyers, to carry the Prime Minister, Chief of the Naval Staff and other important passengers to the United States of America.

The Home Fleet cruiser commitments were such that it was possible only to maintain one on patrol in the Denmark Strait, and several were overdue for refit or had suffered damage from heavy weather. The destroyers had been reinforced, from other Home Commands to make possible certain operations planned for the Norwegian coast.

The departure of the DUKE OF YORK's screen left the RODNEY at Hvalfjord with no screen at all.

In the opinion of the CinC Home Fleet the situation was such that the danger of a break-out had become greater than the risk of losses to U-boats. He asked the admiralty;-

- 1. For an assurance that neither RENOWN or VICTORIOUS would be withdrawn from the Home Fleet before the DUKE OF YORK had returned and completed working up.*

2. *For the loan of three destroyers to screen the RODNEY and six corvettes to enable him to maintain three on patrol in the Denmark Strait in co-operation with the cruiser.*

These requests were agreed to, except that the number of corvettes was reduced to four. The Flag officer 1st CS was instructed to organise the patrols of these corvettes in the Denmark Strait, two being on patrol at a time)

20th – RODNEY with destroyers WALKER, VERITY and WITHERINGTON departed Hvalfjord for position 61-00N, 14-30W.

21st – At 1400 hours in position 61N, 14-30W RODNEY with destroyers WALKER, VERITY and WITHERINGTON Rved with RENOWN and destroyers MONTROSE, WORCESTER and FORESTER. RODNEY and RENOWN exchanged escorts.

RODNEY with destroyers MONTROSE, WORCESTER and FORESTER steered for Scapa Flow.

22nd – At 1200 hours RODNEY with destroyers MONTROSE, WORCESTER and FORESTER arrived at Scapa Flow.

1942

January

RODNEY at Scapa Flow

(On 17/1/42 the CinC Home Fleet received information that the TIRPITZ might be at sea. Though not entirely conclusive, the indications pointed to some operation or movement other than a breakout into the Atlantic. It was now, however, necessary to allow for this, and dispositions were made to prevent a breakout. The TIRPITZ and destroyers BEITZEN, HEINEMANN, JACOBI and Z.29, had sailed from Wilhelmshaven on the 14/1/42 for Trondheim)

17th – At 1600 hours battleships KING GEORGE V (Flag CinC Home Fleet), RODNEY, aircraft carrier VICTORIOUS, heavy cruiser SUFFOLK, light cruisers NIGERIA (Flag 10th CS), KENYA, SHEFFIELD (Flag 18th CS), and destroyers INGLEFIELD (D.3), FAULKNOR (D.8), MARNE, PANTHER, BEDOUIN, ASHANTI, ESKIMO, INTREPID, ECHO and ESCAPADE departed Scapa Flow for Hvalfjord.

19th – The Home Fleet arrived at Hvalfjord.

20th – At 1600 hours KING GEORGE V (Flag CinC Home Fleet), RODNEY, VICTORIOUS, SUFFOLK, NIGERIA, KENYA, SHEFFIELD, and destroyers INGLEFIELD, FAULKNOR, MARNE, PANTHER, BEDOUIN, ASHANTI, ESKIMO, INTREPID, ECHO and ESCAPADE sailed from Hvalfjord for position 61N, 25W.

(On 23/1/42 the TIRPITZ was located and photographed by the RAF. She was at anchor at the head of Aasfjord, 15 miles east of Trondheim)

24th – The Home Fleet returned to Hvalfjord.

February

12th – At 1300 hours RODNEY, escorted by destroyers SOMALI, ORIBI and OFFA sailed from Hvalfjord for the Clyde.

14th – At 0900 hours in the Minches destroyers SOMALI detached for Loch Alsh.

15th – At 0015 hours RODNEY and destroyers ORIBI and OFFA arrived in the Clyde off Gourock.

16th – RODNEY escorted by destroyer PIORUN sailed from the Clyde for Liverpool.

En route, off Belfast the destroyer WATCHMAN joined the escort.

Later in the day RODNEY and destroyers PIORUN and WATCHMAN arrived at Liverpool and was docked at Cammell Lairds in Birkenhead.

After five weeks she was moved across the Mersey by tugs and dry docked in Gladstone Dock Liverpool. During her refit she received attention to her hull, boilers and steering. The 16in gun barrels were replaced and

addition 20mm Oerlikons were fitted. Her radar fit was upgraded and Type 282, 283 and 285 sets were fitted.

March and April,

Under refit.

May

4th – At 1700 hours RODNEY escorted by destroyers NEWMARKET and BLEASDALE sailed from Liverpool for Scapa.

5th – At 2130 hours RODNEY escorted by destroyers NEWMARKET and BLEASDALE arrived at Scapa Flow to commence working up.

June

3rd – At 0700 hours RODNEY escorted by destroyers BLANKNEY, ESCAPADE, and MIDDLETON sailed from Scapa for Greenock.

4th – At 0700 hours RODNEY escorted by destroyers BLANKNEY, ESCAPADE, and MIDDLETON arrived at Greenock.

5th – 0400 hours RODNEY escorted by PATHFINDER, PENN and QUENTIN sailed from Greenock to catch up with troop convoy WS 19

(Troop convoy WS 19P of 19 troopships and 4 storeships, had formed up off Orsay at 0600/1/6/42 and headed for Freetown. At 1200/7/6/42 the AQUITANIA detached as WS 19PQ and proceeded independently to Freetown. This deployment was part of the Admiralty's plan to reinforce the Eastern Fleet with NELSON and RODNEY)

15th - RODNEY escorted by PATHFINDER, PENN and QUENTIN arrived at Freetown.

19th – At 0930 hours convoy WS 19P commenced leaving Freetown followed by the escort of RODNEY, NELSON and destroyers DERWENT, PATHFINDER, PENN, QUENTIN and VELOX. On leaving Freetown the convoy steered for the Cape.

21st – At 1400 hours in approximate position 2N, 10-15W the destroyer VELOX detached to RV with the repair ship VINDICTIVE.

24th – In the afternoon the destroyer DERWENT detached to refuel at St Helena, which was approximately 850 miles to the south west.

25th – RODNEY and NELSON refuelled the destroyers PATHFINDER, PENN and QUENTIN.

26th – At 1100 hours in approximate position 12-19S, 8-39E the convoy RVed with the heavy cruiser SHROPSHIRE. Following which RODNEY, NELSON and destroyers PATHFINDER, PENN and QUENTIN detached to return north.

(The reason the battleships detached and returned north was because the Admiralty decided that they were required for Operation PEDESTAL)

27th – RODNEY experienced problems with her steering mechanism.

28th – RODNEY's steering problems persisted.

RODNEY, NELSON and destroyers PATHFINDER, PENN and QUENTIN were joined by the destroyer DERWENT from St Helena.

July

1st – At 0400 hours RODNEY, NELSON and destroyers DERWENT, PATHFINDER, PENN and QUENTIN arrived at Freetown.

Whilst at Freetown the ships staff carried out work on her steering mechanism.

16th – RODNEY sailed from Freetown with DERWENT in company to carry out steering trials, during which all

appeared to be satisfactory.

17th – At 0630 hours RODNEY, NELSON and destroyers DERWENT and PATHFINDER sailed from Freetown.

21st – South of the Azores PATHFINDER detached and picked up 23 survivors from the SS CORTONA 7093grt.

(The CORTONA had detached from convoy OS 33 had been sunk on 12/7/42 by U 116 and U 201, PATHFINDER landed her survivors at Londonderry on 26/7/42)

22nd – The destroyer DERWENT detached and destroyers PENN and QUENTIN joined from Freetown.

23rd – RODNEY, NELSON, escorted by destroyers PENN, and QUENTIN, RVED with destroyers SOMALI, ICARUS and FORESIGHT from Londonderry.

26th – At 1100 hours RODNEY, NELSON, escorted by destroyers SOMALI, ICARUS, FORESIGHT, PENN, and QUENTIN arrived Scapa from Freetown.

RODNEY immediately commenced a boiler clean and rectification work on her steering mechanism.

August

2nd - At 1545 the NELSON (Flag Vice-Admiral E N Syfret CinC Force F), RODNEY (embarked, travelling incognito was Vice Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser, the deputy CinC HF) and destroyers ASHANTI, SOMALI, ESKIMO, TARTAR, PATHFINDER and QUENTIN sailed from Scapa for Operation PEDESTAL. (The destroyer PENN was delayed by defects).

At 2000 Convoy W S 21S, comprising 13MT ships and one tanker, left the Clyde with the light cruisers NIGERIA and KENYA, and destroyers BICESTER and BRAMHAM for Operation PEDESTAL.

(Operation PEDESTAL was an operation to pass a supply convoy MW 12, of 13 MT ships and a tanker, through the western Mediterranean to Malta. The convoy was provided with the largest escort that the Admiralty could assemble. The convoy sailed from the Clyde at 2000/2/8/42 under the designation WS 21S)

3rd – At 0430 hours the destroyer PENN sailed from Scapa.

At 1400 hours in approximate position 55-30N, 9-30W with the convoy sailing west at 12 knots, the convoy escort of NIGERIA and KENYA and destroyers BICESTER and BRAMHAM was joined by Force F of NELSON, RODNEY, ASHANTI, TARTAR, SOMALI, PATHFINDER, QUENTIN, and ESKIMO.

At 1500 hours KEPPLER, MALCOLM, AMAZON, VENOMOUS and WOLVERINE from Londonderry joined the convoy following which the convoy turned on to a southerly course at 14 knots.

At 1630 hours PENN arrived at Londonderry to refuel.

At 2030 hours PENN sailed from Londonderry to catch up with the convoy WS 21S.

4th - At 1034 hours the convoy changed on to 186¼.

In the morning NIGERIA refuelled DERWENT, VENOMOUS, WISHART and WOLVERINE. KENYA refuelled AMAZON, MALCOLM and ZETLAND.

NIGERIA and KENYA then detached to refuel at Gibraltar.

In the morning the destroyer PENN joined the convoy.

During the day the convoy carried out the manoeuvre of changing from 4 to 2 columns with destroyers ASHANTI and DERWENT taking the place of the column leaders.

At 1500 hours the convoy course changed to 155¼

5th - At 1100 a U-boat contact was made and the convoy did a 45¼ turn to port.

In the morning the light cruiser MANCHESTER and aircraft carrier FURIOUS [822 Sqd - 4 Albacores (detachment) and with 38 Spitfire VB's with modified propellers (because of problems with the hump in FURIOUS's deck) embarked for Malta, Operation BELLOWS] and the destroyers, ORP BLYSKAWICA and WISHART joined the convoy.

Following which MANCHESTER, ESKIMO, TARTAR, WISHART and DERWENT detached to refuel at Gibraltar.

During the day the ships of the convoy and escort practiced blind and umbrella barrages and emergency turns.

A FW 200 was spotted in the distance by a lookout from the MT ship SS EMPIRE HOPE.

In the evening the convoy ran into thick fog.

6th – During the night the convoy continued in thick fog.

At 1500 hours the convoy course was altered to 155¼ and FURIOUS and ORP BLYSKAWICA detached to take part in Operation BERSERK.

(Operation BERSERK [This was an exercise involving five aircraft carriers to improve Fighter Direction and multi-carrier operating techniques in preparation for the defence of the Malta convoy, Operation PEDESTAL]. The operation was carried out in position 35N, 14W.

INDOMITABLE [with the most experienced fighters aboard, these were 800 Sqd - 12 Sea Hurricanes, 880 Sqd - 12 Sea Hurricanes, 880 Sqd - 6 Martlet IIs, 827 Sqd - 12 Albacores and 831 Sqd - 12 Albacores] with her attendant light cruiser PHOEBE.

EAGLE [801 Sqd - 12 Sea Hurricanes with 4 more in reserve, 813 Sqd - 4 Sea Hurricanes] with her attendant light cruiser CHARYBDIS.

VICTORIOUS [809 Sqd - 12 Fulmars, 884 Sqd - 6 Fulmars, 885 Sqd - 6 Sea Hurricanes, 817 Sqd - 2 Albacores (9 detached), 832 Sqd - 12 Albacores] with her attendant light cruiser SIRIUS.

ARGUS [804 Sqd - 6 Sea Hurricanes]

FURIOUS [822 Sqd - 4 Albacores (detachment) and 38 Spitfires embarked for Malta]

Escorted by destroyers INTREPID, ICARUS, FORESIGHT, FURY, ANTELOPE, ITHURIEL, WRESTLER LAFOREY (D19), LOOKOUT and LIGHTNING the operation lasted 2 days

RFA ABBEYDALE escorted by the corvettes ARMERIA and BURDOCK known as Force W. [ABBEYDALE was in attendance to refuel the escorts but due to unsuitable equipment and inexperienced crew refuelling was not completed]. This meant that additional vessels, above those planned for, had to be refuelled in Gibraltar on 7th and 8th August)

8th - At 1015 in approximate position 36N, 15W convoy WS 21S changed to course to 092¼.

The FAA aircraft performed dummy air attacks during the afternoon, followed by a fly past. This was done to exercise the radar reporting and fighter direction organization and to give ships' gun crews an opportunity to recognize the markings of friendly aircraft.

At the end of BERSERK the five carriers joined the main force; there were then a total of 67 ships in company.

9th - Night of 9/10 (At midnight Cape Spartel was passed) the passage of the Strait of Gibraltar was uneventful. Fishing boats and one merchant vessel were passed at close quarters, but due to a moonless night and indifferent visibility, it was thought improbable that the force had been sighted from the shore. Reports received later, however, showed that the enemy was fully aware of the convoy's passage of the Straits.

(During early August the Germans and Italians received reports from their agents in Spain and Ceuta, concerning increased activity of British air and naval forces in the western Mediterranean; and off the Strait of Gibraltar. On the 5/8/42 this information convinced Kesselring that a large operation to supply Malta from the west was imminent. To meet the threat Kesselring ordered on 5/8/42 the redeployment of aircraft from Crete to Sardinia and Sicily. Kesselring also ordered the II Air Corps to prepare to accommodate reinforcements from X Air Corps that would be transferred for short-term employment and would, in cooperation with the IAF, strengthen the ground organization at Elmas, Sardinia. On the night of 8-9 August enemy agents reported intensive shipping traffic in the Strait of Gibraltar heading east, thus confirming Kesselring's assessment. Because of Kesselring's planning the axis had approximately 784 aircraft available, 456 German and 328 Italian to attack the convoy)

10th - At 0245 hours fog was encountered as the convoy entered the Mediterranean. On entering the Mediterranean the convoy designation became MW 12.

At 0300 hours Force R comprising the oilers DINGLEDALE and BROWN RANGER escorted by corvettes JONQUIL, GERANIUM, SPIREA, COLTSFOOT and SALVONIA sailed from Gibraltar.

At 0500 fog cleared.

At 0500 hours PENN sailed from Gibraltar to RV with the carrier EAGLE which with the other two carriers was stationed about 40 miles astern of the convoy.

At 0500 hours a Vichy French civil aircraft flying from France to Algeria reported the convoy as 2 battleships, 2 aircraft carriers, 2 cruisers and 14 destroyers escorting 14 merchant ships.

At 0515 hours VICTORIOUS flew off 2 surplus Albacores and an unserviceable Fulmar to Gibraltar.

At 0525 hours VICTORIOUS scrambled 4 Sea Hurricanes to intercept an unidentified aircraft, which they failed to do.

At 0645 hours VICTORIOUS again scrambled Sea Hurricanes to intercept an unidentified aircraft, which turned out to be a RAF Hudson which hadn't switched on its IFF.

At 0745 hours CAIRO, TARTAR, ESKIMO, QUENTIN, ITHURIEL and ANTELOPE joined the convoy.

At 0800 hours ASHANTI, SOMALI, LEDBURY and ZETLAND joined the convoy.

At 0840 hours the convoy proceeded east at 13½ knots

At 1130 hours MANCHESTER, INDOMITABLE, EAGLE, CHARYBDIS, LAFOREY, LOOKOUT and LIGHTNING, rejoined the convoy after fuelling at Gibraltar.

At 1600 hours EAGLE, CHARYBDIS, PENN, and PATHFINDER joined the convoy from Gibraltar.

Up to 1600 hours the escorts that refuelled in Gibraltar joined the convoy, except for WRESTLER who was replaced by AMAZON

At 2130 hours ASHANTI, LEDBURY, ZETLAND, WILTON, BRAMHAM, BICESTER, FORESIGHT and DERWENT detached to RV with Force R

11th - Between 0600 and 2030 the oilers DINGLEDALE and BROWN RANGER of Force R refueled CAIRO and the 24 destroyers of Force Z and X namely:

Force Z escorts LAFOREY (D19), LIGHTNING, LOOKOUT, ESKIMO, SOMALI, TARTAR, QUENTIN, ITHURIEL, ANTELOPE, VANSITTART, WESTCOTT, ZETLAND and WILTON [WRESTLER was part of Force Z escorts but had been delayed at Gibraltar with a mechanical defect. She was later replaced by AMAZON from Gibraltar]

Force X escorts ASHANTI (D6), FORESIGHT, FURY, INTREPID, ICARUS, PATHFINDER, PENN, BICESTER, BRAMHAM, DERWENT and LEDBURY.

At 0815 the first radar contact with enemy Ju 88,s was made these were flying at 20000 feet and difficult for the FAA Fulmars and Hurricanes to intercept. However one was shot down but a Fulmar and Hurricane were lost, but their crews were picked up.

At 0845 SIRIUS, PHOEBE and JAUNTY joined the convoy after refuelling from Force R.

At 0840 hours the Italian submarine UARSCIEK surfaced astern of the convoy and reported its speed, course and composition.

At 1010 hours a German Ju 88 reported the convoy as being in position 38-08N, 01-56E, which was slightly out, steering 90¼ and comprising 3 aircraft carriers, 3 battleships, 20 cruisers and destroyers and 20 merchant ships.

At 1055 hours the CinC in NELSON received VA North Atlantic's signal 0902A informing of an enemy sighting report of Force F at 0620Z (This was the signal made by UARSCIEK).

At 1128 hours three distant disturbances, as if from torpedo discharges, were observed from NELSON and CHARYBDIS, bearing 200¼ at 3 miles.

At 1218 hours FURIOUS screened by LIGHTNING and LOOKOUT moved out to the port quarter to commence Operation BELLOWS.

At 1229 the first Spitfire flew off FURIOUS, 16 were flown off before emergency turns made necessary by the torpedoing of EAGLE. By 1450 hours 38 had been flown off, one of which made an emergency landing on INDOMITABLE. The remaining 37 arrived at Malta. The flying distance between FURIOUS and Malta was 555 nautical miles (1,028 km) to 584 nautical miles (1,082 km).

At 1315 EAGLE was torpedoed by 4 torpedoes from U 73, in position 38-05N, 3-02E, she was positioned on the quarter of the starboard wing; convoy speed was 13 knots, mean line of advance 090¼. LAFOREY and LOOKOUT were ordered to stand by EAGLE; JAUNTY also immediately proceeded towards EAGLE. The 927 survivors were picked up by the three vessels, 163 of her crew were lost. At the time of her sinking, EAGLE had 4 Sea Hurricanes in the air. One landed on INDOMITABLE and 3 on VICTORIOUS.

Following the sinking of Eagle, the convoy made a series of rapid emergency manoeuvres

At 1420 hours approaching aircraft were detected by radar at a great height.

At 1430 hours NELSON and RODNEY opened fire in barrage at the unseen aircraft, but checked fire after a few minutes.

At 1430 hours the destroyers KEPPEL, MALCOLM, VENOMOUS, WOLVERINE and WRESTLER from Gibraltar arrived on the scene of EAGLE's sinking. These destroyers had arrived to escort FURIOUS back to Gibraltar. However on their arrival Captain D19, ordered KEPPEL, MALCOLM and VENOMOUS to carry out an anti-submarine sweep.

At 1515 hours FURIOUS successfully completed Operation BELLOWS. She then set course to return Gibraltar escorted by the destroyers WOLVERINE and WRESTLER.

At 1545 hours KEPPEL, MALCOLM, VENOMOUS, WOLVERINE and WRESTLER having been unsuccessful in locating U 73, rejoined in the rescue effort. Captain Hutton ordered them to take on board EAGLE's survivors that

had been picked up; KEPPEL embarked 194 survivors from LAFOREY, VENOMOUS embarked 535 survivors from LOOKOUT and MALCOLM embarked 198 survivors from JAUNTY.

AMAZON detached from the convoy when ordered to take JAUNTY under her orders.

At 1634 hours the CinC received the VA North Atlantic signal 1446A, warning that the enemy would probably make a Ju 88 attack at dusk.

At 1635 hours NELSON, RODNEY and the cruisers NIGERIA, KENYA and MANCHESTER streamed paravanes. From 1700 hours the convoy was being shadowed by enemy aircraft.

At 1830 hours the transfer of EAGLE's survivors was complete and LAFOREY and LOOKOUT then proceeded to RV with Force R to refuel prior to rejoining the convoy.

At 1830 hours KEPPEL, MALCOLM, VENOMOUS, WOLVERINE and WRESTLER joined FURIOUS and escorted her back to Gibraltar.

At 1854 hours the CinC ordered D6 in the absence of D19 to position the escorts in Cruising Disposition No 17 to repel an air attack expected at sunset.

At 2030 hours LAFOREY and LOOKOUT rejoined the convoy.

At 2056 hours, 15 minutes after sunset, an air attack by 30 Ju 88's and six 11/FG26s He 111 torpedo-bombers took place. The He 111's were put off their torpedo runs by the barrage. Two bombs were fell close astern of LAFOREY without causing any damage. The only casualty from this raid was MANCHESTER'S Walrus aircraft. The attack lasted until 2130 hours. Three aircraft, two by VICTORIOUS, were claimed to have been shot down by ships gunfire. Force R came under air attack at the same time. No damage was done to any ship in this attack.

At 2100 hours QUENTIN (position A) obtained a sonar contact and made a DC attack, without result.

(RAF medium and heavy bombers from Malta were made small raids on Sardinian and Sicilian airfields in an attempt to take some of the pressure off the convoy. At Elmas the RAF bombers were spotted, and the enemy was able to get his planes away. But, at Decimomannu the RAF achieved complete surprise and destroyed six bombers, badly damaging several others. As the flight returned to Malta, it sighted Admiral da Zara's 7th Cruiser Squadron which had just sortied out from the harbour and was steering east. The Beaufighters shadowed the group for a while, but were low on fuel and broke off and returned to Malta. A Wellington was sent out to keep an eye on the Italians, 'O for Orange', the Wellington made an ASV contact at 2,500 feet and reported locating four cruisers and eight destroyers steering east, the ships were followed into the Tyrrhenian Sea. The Wellington made an ineffectual bombing attack at 0130/12/8/42 before turning back to Malta)

(A further diversion, Operation WHYNOT, an attack on the Italian airfield of Catania, Sicily, was mounted by M section of the SBS. At 2100/11/8/42 the submarine UNA, from Malta, surfaced in approximate position 37-28N, 15-06E which was about 1400 yards from the beach and launched 3 Folboats, a fourth one was found to be holed, carrying the 6 man M section. Their mission was to destroy as many of the German Ju 88's, that were known to be on the airfield, as possible. Unfortunately they were surprised by a patrol and had to abort their mission. They attempted to return to UNA but without success and they were eventually captured)

12th - At 0630 hours a German Ju 88 sighted the convoy and reported 50 ships in position 37-50N, 06-50E. As did an Italian Cant Z1007.

At 0630 hours INDOMITABLE and VICTORIOUS both flew off 2 Sea Hurricanes, but they lacked the speed to catch the shadowers.

At 0710 hours the carriers launched a standing patrol of 12 fighters.

At 0740 hours the KENYA sighted 3 torpedo tracks and turned to comb them. As KENYA was astern of the convoy in company with NELSON and RODNEY it was likely that the battleships were the target

At 0800 hours, based on information received about a possible submarine concentration north of Galita Island, the CinC ordered D19 to reduce the distance between the ahead and wing destroyers.

The submarines UARSCIEK, U 73 and U 205 were in contact astern of the convoy and were transmitting sighting reports.

At 0907 hours radar picked up a large number of aircraft approaching from ahead, there turned out to be 19 Ju 88's dive bombers, 6 of which were shot down; no damage was inflicted on the convoy.

The first air attack of the day proved to be disastrous, with a merchant ship sunk and destroyer FORESIGHT damaged.

At 0923 hours LAFOREY (position B) made a DC attack on a possible submarine contact.

At 0935 hours lookouts on RODNEY observed torpedoes, ahead crossing from port to starboard.

At 0935 hours FURY (on the starboard wing) confirmed a sonar contact, this was thought to be the same contact that LAFOREY had attacked, and made a DC attack, FORESIGHT joined her in the hunt. This turned out to be the

Italian submarine BRIN.

At 0940 hours D19 ordered all the destroyers to rejoin the screen.

At 0955 hours FORESIGHT was sunk by TARTAR in position 37-40N, 10-00E.

At 1045 hours lookouts on RODNEY observed a torpedo passing astern.

At 1135 hours PATHFINDER (position C port bow) obtained a sonar contact and was joined in the attack by ZETLAND.

At 1150 hours PATHFINDER and ZETLAND called off the hunt and rejoined the screen.

At 1200 hours radar reported an air attack from ahead.

At 1211 hours the destroyers in the van opened fire on the attackers.

At 1215 hours the Italian air force attacked with 10 Sm 84's of 38 Gruppo's 32 Stormo each armed with 2 Motobomba FFF's, escorted by 14 Mc 202 fighters. In order to avoid what were thought to be mines the convoy made an emergency turn of 90¼ to port.

(The Motobomba FFF (Freri, Fiore, Filpa), was a torpedo developed by the Italians in 1939. The designation FFF was derived from the last names the three men involved with its original design: Lieutenant-Colonel Prospero Freri, Captain-Disegnatore Filpa, and Colonel Amedeo Fiore. The weapon was a 500 mm diameter electric torpedo which was dropped on a parachute, on entering the water it was designed to steer concentric spirals of between 500 and 4,000 m until it found a target. It weighed 350 kg had a 120 kg warhead, a speed of 40 knots and an endurance of 15–30 minutes)

At 1217 hours RODNEY shot down an Italian bomber.

Further air attacks were made on the convoy by 33 Sm 79's torpedo bombers and 10 Sm 84's torpedo bombers, escorted by 26 Re 2001's. The FAA fighters dealt effectively with the Sm 84's before they could reach the convoy. The Sm 79's, however pressed on, attacking from the port bow, port beam and starboard quarter and all their attacks were beaten off mainly by the 16 inch guns of NELSON and RODNEY firing shells with a proximity fuse which burst in the air and shells with impact fuses which, when they hit the sea, created a splash barrage.

As the Italians withdrew the Germans arrived, it had been planned as a co-ordinated attack but the timings were out. The German force was 37 Ju 88 dive bombers, they were engaged by the FAA fighters, but 12 Ju 88's broke through to the convoy.

At 1300 hours the MV DEUCALION 7740grt, lead ship of the port column, was hit by a stick of bombs from a Ju 88. The bombs caused serious damage; she lost electrical power and stopped. At this point some of the crew, without orders, abandoned ship. However her captain thought she could be saved. The BRAMHAM was ordered to stand by DEUCALION. Eventually DEUCALION was got under way making 10 knots, later she worked up to 12 knots. The two vessels made for the Tunisian coast with the intention of proceeding westward along the coast. Later DEUCALION managed to work up to her maximum speed of 16 knots, but due to stresses on the damaged hull she had to reduce speed to 12.5 knots.

At 1305 hours RODNEY was under air attack.

At 1330 hours bombs fell off RODNEY's starboard side. NELSON and CAIRO were also suffered near misses.

At 1345 hours as VICTORIOUS was recovering her Sea Hurricanes, 2 of the 'Hurricanes' detached and dived onto the carriers flight deck both releasing bombs, they were Italian Re2001's. The bombs were estimated to be about 50Kg.

At 1400 hours RODNEY experienced steering problems and was forced to keep her speed below 15 knots.

At 1650 hours ITHURIEL (position I port quarter) DCed and rammed and sank the Italian submarine COBALTO in position 37-39N, 10E, she picked up 41 survivors. Two of ITHURIEL's crew managed to get as far as the conning tower before the sub went down.

At 1750 hours when ITHURIEL, who's maximum speed was 20 knots due to her damaged bow, was returning to her place in the screen she was attacked by 4 Ju 88's and a Cr 42 fighter bombers. No damage was caused.

At 1800 hours the convoy course was altered in succession to 121¼, this being the course to pass through the Skerki Channel.

At 1800 hours further heavy air attacks developed on the convoy, estimated at 100 to 120 aircraft, their were 22 FAA fighters in the air at the time. In this attack RODNEY was singled out by an Italian Ju 87. The bomb landed in the sea just off the port side abreast X turret. Following this attack RODNEY engaged 10 Sm79 torpedo bombers approaching on her starboard side. In the middle of this attack the convoy made an emergency turn to port to avoid what was thought to be aircraft laying mines ahead.

The violent manoeuvring carried out by RODNEY had caused further problems with her boilers reducing her speed to 18 knots.

In this attack FORESIGHT was torpedoed on her starboard side aft, breaking her back and wrecking her steering gear.

At 1820 hours VICTORIOUS managed to fly off 4 Fulmars.

At 1830 hours 12 Ju 87's of 1/Stg.3 singled out INDOMITABLE she received two direct hits from 500kg bombs and three near misses. This attack finished INDOMITABLE as a fighting unit. CHARYBDIS, LOOKOUT LIGHTNING and SOMALI were detached to stand by INDOMITABLE who turned west away from the wind.

At 1836 hours RODNEY came under attack from Italian Ju 87's.

At 1842 hours a bomb landed on RODNEY's X turret, it failed to penetrate the armour and it bounced off and landed in the sea on her port side.

At 1848 hours an enemy aircraft crashed off RODNEY's port bow.

At 1855 hours in approximate position 37-42N, 10E, Force Z detached and withdrew westwards. The withdrawal was brought forward by 20 minutes due to the damaged INDOMITABLE.

Force Z comprised NELSON, RODNEY (limited to 15 knots by boiler problems), VICTORIOUS, INDOMITABLE (severely damaged but eventually able to steam at 28 knots), CHARYBDIS, PHOEBE, SIRIUS, LAFOREY, LIGHTNING, LOOKOUT, QUENTIN, ESKIMO, SOMALI, TARTAR, ITHURIEL (damaged from ramming and limited to 20 knots), ANTELOPE, AMAZON, WESTCOTT, WISHART and ZETLAND.

At 1956 hours when the convoy was in position 37-40N, 10-06E, the submarine AXUM fired 4 torpedoes and hit the CAIRO (was hit by two torpedoes, port side aft, she immediately lost power and started to settle by the stern), NIGERIA (was hit in the forward boiler room and lost all electrical power, took on a list of 13¼ and started to circle to starboard). Also as she and CAIRO were the fighter direction ships the support of the RAF fighters from Malta was lost) and OHIO (the torpedo hit amidships, created a hole, 24ft. x 27ft., wrecked the pump room and started a fire).

At 2115 hours on hearing about the torpedoing of NIGERIA and CAIRO, the CinC of Force Z immediately ordered CHARYBDIS, SOMALI and ESKIMO to reinforce Force X.

13th - Throughout the day Force Z proceeded westward.

At 2300 hours RODNEY, INDOMITABLE, ITHURIEL, ANTELOPE, AMAZON, WESTCOTT, WISHART and ZETLAND detached and proceeded to Gibraltar at RODNEY's best speed. The remainder of Force Z turned eastward to give cover to Force X should the Italian navy decide to attack.

14th - At 1830 hours RODNEY, INDOMITABLE, ITHURIEL, ANTELOPE, AMAZON, WESTCOTT, WISHART and ZETLAND arrived at Gibraltar.

16th - At 0200 hours RODNEY, with survivors from CAIRO embarked and VICTORIOUS escorted by the destroyers ASHANTI, INTREPID, ICARUS, and MATCHLESS sailed from Gibraltar for the UK. RODNEY's steering was still causing problems.

19th - The force ran into a gale which necessitated repeated helm movements. This caused further problems with her steering.

20th - RODNEY had further problems with her boilers.

At 1400 hours in approximate position 53N, 30W the force was joined by the destroyers INGLEFIELD, ECLIPSE, WORCESTER and WINDSOR.

Following which the destroyers INTREPID and ICARUS detached from Greenock.

21st - At 2000 hours RODNEY and VICTORIOUS escorted by destroyers ASHANTI, MATCHLESS, INGLEFIELD, ECLIPSE, WORCESTER and WINDSOR arrived at Scapa Flow.

RODNEY disembarked Vice Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser. Then almost immediately she sailed for Rosyth escorted by INGLEFIELD, ECLIPSE and WINDSOR.

22nd - At 1030 hours RODNEY arrived at Rosyth. Where she was immediately taken in hand for essential repairs to her steering and boilers. During her stay at Rosyth she also received further 20mm Oerlikons.

September

Under repair at Rosyth.

20th - At 1400 hours RODNEY and the aircraft carrier VICTORIOUS escorted by the destroyers WHADDON and BLEAN sailed from Rosyth for Scapa Flow.

21st - At 0400 hours RODNEY and VICTORIOUS escorted by the destroyers WHADDON and BLEAN arrived at Scapa Flow.

22nd - At 0600 hours RODNEY escorted by the destroyers TANATSIDE, PENYLAN and BLEAN sailed from Scapa Flow for Loch Cairnbawn (Loch a' Chairn Bhain) which is an inlet at the head of Eddrachillis Bay in

Sutherland.

At 1430 hours RODNEY arrived in Loch Cairnbawn she anchored then proceeded to surrounded herself with anti-torpedo netting and other underwater defence equipment.

(Located in Loch Cairnbawn was base HHZ, this was a secret base where British charioteers were training with their mark 1 chariots to attack the German battleship TIRPITZ at its anchorage in Trondhiemfjord. RODNEY was there to provide a practice target for the charioteers)

29th – At 1800 hours in Eddrachillis Bay RODNEY Rved with the destroyers MONTROSE, HOLCOMBE and IMPULSIVE and course was then set for Scapa Flow.

At 2400 hours RODNEY, MONTROSE, HOLCOMBE and IMPULSIVE arrived at Scapa Flow.

October

2nd to 9th – RODNEY carried out exercises in and around Scapa Flow.

10th – Early in the morning RODNEY sailed from Scapa Flow to carry out gunnery exercises. RODNEY returned to Scapa in the afternoon. After picking up her moorings and securing from sea, the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill came on board. The lower deck was cleared and Churchill addressed the crew who were assembled on the quarterdeck.

(RODNEY had been nominated for support duties in Operation TORCH, the allied landings in North Africa)

23rd – At 1700 hours RODNEY (with senior British and US army embarked) escorted by the destroyers LOOKOUT, PANTHER and PENN sailed from Scapa for Gibraltar.

26th – RODNEY was sighted by a U-Boat and reported as an American battleship.

29th – RODNEY, LOOKOUT, PANTHER and PENN arrived at Gibraltar.

November

1st – Early in the morning the cruiser SCYLLA (with Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham embarked; Cunningham was to be the CinC of Allied naval forces for Operation TORCH) and the destroyer OPPORTUNE arrived at Gibraltar.

6th – At 1930 hours RODNEY sailed from Gibraltar and steered east into the Mediterranean and joined Force H. (The task of Force H was to patrol as far east as 3-30E, provide distant cover to prevent any attempt by the Italian or Vichy French Fleets to interfere with the landings at Algiers or Oran. The assault over the beaches was due at H hour, which was set for 0100/ 8/11/42 for the landing at Oran)

7th – At 1645 hours Force H was attacked by Ju 88's who were driven off by the ships AA fire. Late in the evening RODNEY with destroyers BEAGLE, BOREAS and BULLDOG detached from Force H to provide support for the Central Task Force off Oran.

8th – At 0500 hours RODNEY and the destroyers BEAGLE, BOREAS and BULLDOG were in position 20 miles north of Oran. This was the general area from where the carrier group of, FURIOUS, DASHER and BITER were operating.

At 0645 hours the cruiser AURORA and the destroyer CAPEL, who were off the beaches X and Y to the west of Oran, in position 35-55N, 1-05W, was in action with the Vichy French destroyers TRAMONTANE, EPERVIER, TYPHON and TORNADE.

The EPERVIER and TRAMONTANE were damaged by gunfire and driven ashore.

During the course of the action the JAMAICA and the destroyer FARNDALE arrived on the scene and joined the battle. JAMAICA fired 501 rounds of 6in but only managed to damage the TYPHON.

At 0730 hours the badly damaged TORNADE sank.

The TYPHON suffered damage but managed to make Oran harbour, where she scuttled herself across the harbour entrance.

(The waters off Y Beach at Les Andalouses, west of Oran were within range of the four 194 mm guns of the Fort du Santon, situated 1000 ft above Mers el Kebir harbour. At daylight intermittent shelling of the transport area began. Shortly before 0900/8/11/42, the transports there came under accurate fire, and at 0917 hours, the HMT LLANGIBBY CASTLE 11,951grt, received the first of several damaging hits which obliged her to move farther west and out of range. At 1050 hours the battery at Fort du Santon resumed firing at Y Beach and achieved a hit on the HMT MONARCH of BERMUDA 22,424grt, causing her to move out of range. The fort's guns also targeted the AURORA who was

straddled but not hit. AURORA called on RODNEY to suppress the fort)

At 1250 hours RODNEY launched her Walrus to spot fall of shot.

At 1300 hours RODNEY opened fire on Fort du Stanton at a range of 30000 yards (the French 194mm/50 M1902 was thought to have a maximum range of 28500 yards). Because the fort was surrounded by housing RODNEY had to take great care not to cause civilian damage. After firing sixteen 16in shells low cloud caused her to cease firing. Damage to fort was difficult to ascertain as during the bombardment the guns of Fort du Stanton remained silent. During the shoot RODNEY was forced to make an emergency turn to avoid a torpedo (the torpedo had possibly been fired by a Vichy French submarine, either the ARGONAUTE or the ACTEON both had sailed from Oran earlier and both were sunk later in the day by ACHATES and WESTCOTT).

At 1500 hours RODNEY again fired at Fort du Stanton with her main armament, again the fort didn't reply.

At 2030 hours RODNEY was patrolling off shore, notionally out of range of Fort du Stanton's guns, when the Fort's guns open fire on RODNEY and achieved several near misses. RODNEY immediately moved out of range.

At 2130 hours RODNEY carried out a main armament shoot against Fort du Stanton. The fort was silenced temporarily, but RODNEY couldn't knock it out.

9th – RODNEY remained off the Oran beachhead.

10th – RODNEY, AURORA and JAMAICA were off Oran ready to support the American attack on Oran. Force H had also moved closer to Oran to provide air support if required.

During the day RODNEY carried out a shoot against a battery of three 240mm guns at Canastel, to the east of Oran. Then she returned to bombarding Fort du Stanton. In this shoot she was assisted by Albacores from FURIOUS who carried out dive bombing.

At 1230 hours the French capitulated.

11th – RODNEY rejoined Force H, cruising south of the Balearic Islands.

16th – Late in the evening Force H returned to Gibraltar. But the harbour was so crowded that RODNEY was unable to find a berth.

17th – At 0300 hours RODNEY had to anchor outside the harbour.

At 0900 hours RODNEY with the rest of Force H, sailed from Gibraltar for Mers el Kebir.

18th – At 1200 hours Force H arrived at Mers el Kebir.

Whilst at Mers El Kebir RODNEY's ships staff carried out maintenance on her troublesome boilers.

21st – Force H comprising NELSON (Flag), RODNEY, aircraft carriers FORMIDABLE and FURIOUS and Destroyers ASHANTI, ESKIMO, TARTAR, PENN, PARTRIDGE, PATHFINDER, PORCUPINE, LOOKOUT, METEOR, VANOC, PUCKERIDGE and CALPE sailed from Mers-el-Kebir for Gibraltar.

22nd - Force H including RODNEY arrived at Gibraltar.

December

8th – At 0400 hours an Italian SLC, human torpedo, of the Italian 10th Light Flotilla made an attack on Gibraltar harbour. The attack was detected and the attackers apprehended, but not before ships in the harbour, including RODNEY had raised steam and prepared to move out of the harbour.

(The attack had been made by three Italian SLC's; these had been launched from the modified tanker OLTERRA 4995grt, which had been scuttled in the Spanish port of La Linea. The primary targets of the SLC's were the NELSON, FORMIDABLE and FURIOUS. Two of the SLC's failed to penetrate into the harbour and one of whom returned to the OLTERRA. The mission was a debacle; thereof the attackers had died, two were prisoners and only one had made it back. However the British, in a communique dated 8/12/42, indicated that they thought that the attack had been mounted from the submarine AMBRA, so the secret of the OLTERRA had not been revealed)

10th - Force H including RODNEY sailed from Gibraltar for Mers el Kebir.

26th - Force H including RODNEY arrived at Gibraltar.

January

2nd – At 0200 hours Force H including NELSON, RODNEY and FORMIDABLE sailed from Gibraltar and steered west into the Atlantic to RV with troop convoy KMF 6, with 27500 troops embarked.

After making a RV, Force H joined KMF 6 escorting it into the Mediterranean.

Off Gibraltar the SS CITY OF EDINBURGH 8036grt and SS CITY OF PRETORIA 8049grt, both with stores for Malta and escorted by the destroyer VANOC joined the convoy.

3rd - Force H including NELSON, RODNEY and FORMIDABLE arrived at Algiers escorting convoy KMF 6.

5th - Force H including RODNEY arrived at Gibraltar.

Movement between Gibraltar and Mers el Kebir continued during the remainder of January.

February

Movement between Gibraltar and Mers el Kebir continued during through February.

March

Movement between Gibraltar and Mers el Kebir continued during through March.

23rd – RODNEY was at Mers el Kebir when the Italian 10th Light Flotilla made a frogman attack on the harbour. The attack was detected before the frogmen entered the harbour.

April

Movement between Gibraltar and Mers el Kebir continued during through April.

May

7th – The battleship KING GEORGE V escorted by the destroyers METEOR, TROUBRIDGE and TUSCAN arrived at Gibraltar from Scapa.

RODNEY escorted by the destroyers METEOR, TROUBRIDGE and TUSCAN sailed from Gibraltar for Plymouth.

12th – In the western approaches TUSCAN detached. (13/5/43 off Hartland Point TUSCAN hit a floating mine, possibly from British minefield HS1 laid in February 1943 by the cruiser minelayer ADVENTURE)

13th – RODNEY, METEOR and TROUBRIDGE arrived at Plymouth. On arrival at Devonport RODNEY commenced a short refit.

During the refit she was fitted with addition 20mm Oerlikons.

June

1st – RODNEY escorted by the destroyers INGLEFIELD, ONSLOW and OPR PIORUN sailed from Plymouth for Scapa.

3rd - RODNEY escorted by the destroyers INGLEFIELD, ONSLOW and OPR PIORUN arrived at Scapa.

9th – At Scapa where NELSON (Flag Vice Admiral Algernon U Willis CinC Force H), RODNEY, VALIANT and WARSPITE commenced a series of bombardment and preparatory exercises off Cape Wrath in preparation for the planned allied landings in Sicily, Operation HUSKY.

17th – At 1400 hours NELSON (Flag Force H), RODNEY, VALIANT, WARSPITE, aircraft carrier INDOMITABLE and destroyers ECHO, FAULKNER (D8), FURY, INGLEFIELD, INTREPID, OFFA, PANTHER, PATHFINDER, QUAIL, QUEENBOROUGH, QUILLIAM (D4) and ORP PIORUN sailed from Scapa for Gibraltar.

18th – In approximate position 54-30N, 15W the destroyers ARROW, BLANKNEY, BLENCATHRA, BRECON, BRISSENDEN, HAMBLEDON, LEDBURY, MENDIP (D21), PENN, VICEROY, WALLACE and WOOLSTON joined Force H, from Londonderry.

20th – At 2320 hours RAF Liberator V 'BXJ' of 86 Sqd. from Aldergrove, who had been providing anti-submarine patrol around Force H, was forced to ditch. The FAULKNER picked up 6 survivors.

23rd – Force H arrived at Gibraltar.

Also at Gibraltar were the battleships KING GEORGE V and HOWE.

29th – Force H comprising NELSON (Flag, Force H), RODNEY, aircraft carrier INDOMITABLE and destroyers OFFA, PANTHER, PATHFINDER, QUAIL, QUEENBOROUGH, QUILLIAM and ORP PIORUN sailed from Gibraltar for Mers el Kebir.

30th – Force H arrived at Mers el Kebir.

July

5th – At 1500 hours Force H sailed from Mers el Kebir for Algiers.

6th – At 0600 hours Force H arrived at Algiers.

At 1130 hours Force H (Division 1) comprising NELSON (Flag, Force H), RODNEY, aircraft carrier INDOMITABLE, light cruisers CLEOPATRA and EURYALUS and destroyers OFFA, PANTHER, PATHFINDER, QUAIL, QUEENBOROUGH, QUILLIAM and ORP PIORUN sailed from Algiers to take part in Operation HUSKY.

(Operation HUSKY was the allied invasion of Sicily. The primary purpose of the RN capital ships was to prevent the Italian navy from intervening in the operation. Their secondary purpose was on D-1, FORCE H was to move into the Ionian Sea so as to appear to threaten the west coast of Greece on D Day, thus serving as a means to divert the enemy's attention at the critical moment, and it was to maintain this position until D + 2. Their third purpose was to provide bombardment support if required by the army. To carry out their functions they were divided into three divisions:-

Division 1 comprised NELSON (Flag, Force H), RODNEY and INDOMITABLE.

Division 2 comprised WARSPITE, VALIANT and FORMIDABLE.

Division 3 comprised KING GEORGE V (Flag, Vice Admiral Arthur John Power) and HOWE.

Division 3 was also known as Force Z)

8th – The captain of RODNEY, appointed Rear Admiral.

9th – At 0600 hours in approximate position 33N, 18E Force H (Division 1) RVed with Division 2 comprising, battleships WARSPITE and VALIANT, aircraft carrier FORMIDABLE and destroyers FAULKNER, FURY, ECHO, ECLIPSE, INGLEFIELD, ILEX, RAIDER, and HMS QUEEN OLGA from Alexandria. The light cruisers AURORA and PENELOPE joined the force after detaching from convoy KMS 18B. Force H then steered a northerly course towards the Ionian Sea.

At 0730 hours AURORA, PENELOPE, OFFA and INGLEFIELD detached and proceeded towards the east of Sicily to carry out a bombardment of Catania. (Operation ARSENAL).

Force H then moved into the Ionian Sea and manoeuvred so as to appear to threaten the west coast of Greece. This was done to divert the enemy's attention away from Sicily.

They also provided distant cover for the combined convoys, MWF 36 (Ex Port Said 5/7/43) and MWS 36 (Ex Alexandria 3/7/43), SBS 1, SBM 1, SBF 1 (Ex Sfax 8/7/43) and MWS 36X (Ex Tripoli 8/7/43) consisting of MT freighters, tankers, landing ships and landing craft for the invasion of Sicily, Operation HUSKY.

10th – (D Day) Force H moved closer to Sicily and the invasion beaches.

At daylight Force H was approximately 40 miles off Cape Passero.

AURORA, PENELOPE, OFFA and INGLEFIELD rejoined Force H.

During the day Force H continued to patrol off Cape Passero.

11th – Force H cruised off eastern Sicily.

12th - Force H cruised off eastern Sicily.

WARSPITE and VALIANT with escorting destroyers detached from Force H and proceeded to Malta to for refuelling.

13th - 25 miles SE of Cape Spartivento destroyers ECHO and ILEX, who were part of Force H screen, sank the Italian submarine NEREIDE.

14th – RODNEY and destroyer escort detached from Force H for Malta.

On arrival at Grand Harbour RODNEY became the first battleship to Valetta harbour since WARSPITE in December 1940.

16th – RODNEY and destroyer escort sailed from Malta to rejoin Force H.

Late on the night, Force H was subjected to a heavy air attack.

17th – At 0015 hours INDOMITABLE was hit by a torpedo dropped by a Luftwaffe Ju 88 aircraft.

18th – RODNEY with destroyer escort detached from Force H and returned to Malta.

Because of her poor mechanical condition RODNEY spent the remainder of July at Malta.

August

At Malta.

5th – RODNEY sailed from Malta for gunnery exercises.

6th – Returned to Malta.

30th - At 1900 hours Force H, comprising NELSON and RODNEY, light cruiser ORION and destroyers OFFA, PETARD, QUAIL, QUILLIAM, QUEENBOROUGH, TARTAR, TROUBRIDGE, TUMULT and TYRIAN and ORP PIORUN sailed from Malta to carry out Operation HAMMER.

(Operation HAMMER was the naval bombardment of the coastal batteries, including two 203mm guns, on the Calabrian coast adjacent to the Straits of Messina. This was in preparation for landings on Italian mainland by the 8th Army, Operation BAYTOWN, which took place on 3/9/43)

31st - At 1000 hours in position 37-56N, 15-25E at the southern entrance of the Straits of Messina, NELSON commenced bombarding coastal batteries north east of Reggio di Calabria.

At 1030 hours RODNEY commenced her bombardment. One of RODNEY's early salvos landed in the middle of an ammunition dump which exploded making it clear they had hit their target.

The spotting Spitfires reported the targets were well covered and at least one 203mm gun was knocked out.

At 1200 hours the bombardment, which had silenced the shore batteries for good, was terminated and Force H set course for Malta.

At 2000 hours Force H arrived back at Malta.

September

7th - At 1530 hours Division 1 of Force H, comprising NELSON (Flag Force H) and RODNEY (Flag Rear Admiral Force H), aircraft carrier ILLUSTRIOUS and destroyers PETARD, QUAIL, QUEENBOROUGH and QUILLIAM, OFFA, TROUBRIDGE, TUMULT, TYRIAN and ORP PIORUN and the French Destroyers FFS Le FANTASQUE and Le TERRIBLE, sailed from Malta for Operation AVALANCHE. They proceeded NW along the south coast of Sicily.

(Operation AVALANCHE was the landing of the Fifth US Army (6th US Corps and 10th British Corps) in the Gulf of Salerno which took place in the early hours of 9/9/43. The primary purpose of Force H was to prevent the Italian navy from intervening in the operation. [Although not known at the time, the Italians had surrendered on 3/9/43] The secondary purpose was to provide support and air cover for Force V. Force V, also known as TF 88, comprised the escort carriers UNICORN, ATTACKER, BATTLER, HUNTER and STALKER, [carrying a total of 78 Seafire11c to provide fighter cover over the beachhead] light cruisers EURYALUS (Flag Force V Rear Admiral Sir Philip Vian), CHARYBDIS and SCYLLA and destroyers ATHERSTONE, CALPE, CLEVELAND, FARNDALE, HAYDON, HOLCOMBE, LIDDLESDALE, SILVERTON, ORP KRAKOWIAK and SLAZAK)

8th - At 0700 hours in the Sicilian Channel, Division 1 was joined by Division 2 (Who had sailed from Malta at 1715 hours), comprising the battleships WARSPITE and VALIANT, aircraft carrier FORMIDABLE and destroyers ECHO, FAULKNOR, FURY, ILEX, INGLEFIELD, INTREPID, RAIDER and RHS VASILISSA OLGA.

At 1000 hours the combined Force H arrived off Marettimo Island where they cruised until 1730 hours.

At 1400 hours OFFA detached for Bizerta.

At 1730 hours Force H set course for the Salerno area. The course set was designed to keep Force H end on to the moon, thereby presenting the most difficult target for air attack.

At 1830 hours Radio Algiers announced that Italy had concluded an armistice with the Allies.

(At 1845 hours Marshal Badoglio announced on radio "The Italian Government, recognizing the impossibility of continuing the uneven struggle against the overwhelming enemy power, with the intent of saving further and more serious calamities to the Nation, has asked Gen. Eisenhower, CinC of the Allies forces, for an armistice. The request has been accepted. Consequently every action of hostility against the allied armed forces must stop from the Italian armed forces in every place. They [the Italian forces], however, will react to possible attacks of any other origin. The armistice had actually been signed in Sicily on 3/9/43)

From 2100 hours, when in position 40N, 13-30E, the capital ships of Force H were under air attack mainly from Luftwaffe single engined fighter bombers.

9th – From early morning the air attacks continued. In one attack WARSPITE was singled out and a torpedo bomber came within 800 yards before dropping its torpedo.

At 0040 hours the air attacks ceased.

At 0300 hours the assault troops started to land.

At 0500 hours the air attacks re-commenced.

At 1330 hours WARSPITE, VALIANT, FAULKNER, FURY, ECHO, INTREPID, RAIDER, RHS VASILISSA OLGA and FS Le TERRIBLE detached from Force H to carry out Operation GIBBON.

10th – Force H continued to cruise north west of the beachhead to provide air cover for Force V. In afternoon OFFA rejoined.

11th - Force H continued to cruise north west of the beachhead to provide air cover for Force V. In the evening the FORMIDABLE and ILLUSTRIOUS transferred all their serviceable Seafires to the carriers of Force V. Following which Force H sailed for Malta.

12th – In the evening Force H arrived at Malta. Where on arrival they found the surrendered Italian Fleet.

14th - At 1700 hours Force H comprising battleships NELSON (CinC Force H), RODNEY, WARSPITE, and VALIANT, aircraft carriers FORMIDABLE and ILLUSTRIOUS escorted by destroyers JERVIS (D14), ILEX, PATHFINDER, PENN and PETARD sailed from Malta for Gibraltar.

At 2000 hours the CinC Force H received a signal recalling Force H and instructing him to detach WARSPITE and VALIANT with the escorting destroyers to proceed with all dispatch to Salerno Bay.

(The reason for this change was because during the 12th-14th September the Germans unleashed a concerted counterattack by six divisions against the Salerno beachhead with the objective of driving the allies into the sea before it could link with the Eighth Army. Heavy casualties were inflicted and on 13th they drove a salient between the two American divisions, the 34th and 45th, where the Sele and Calore Rivers merge. The Allied troops were too thinly spread to be able to resist the concentrated attacks. The heavy batteries of the battleships were urgently needed to redress the situation. When Admiral Hewitt asked whether heavier naval forces could be made available, Admiral Cunningham ordered the battleships WARSPITE and VALIANT to Salerno and informed Hewitt he would send the battleships NELSON and RODNEY to the Gulf of Salerno later if Hewitt wanted them. Cunningham also ordered three cruisers to sail at top speed to Tripoli to pick up British replacements and rush them to the beachhead)

15th – At 0345 hours RODNEY sailed from Malta for Sicily. On her way out of Valletta RODNEY's stern caught the anti-torpedo boom and the net wrapped itself around her rudder, but the propellers ripped the net to shreds and in the process the stern was swung around hitting the mole. Other than a dent caused by hitting the mole little damage was caused. She then proceeded to Augusta.

At 1100 hours RODNEY arrived at Augusta where she joined NELSON.

17th – RODNEY arrived back at Malta.

25th – RODNEY had a new commanding officer; Captain Robert Oliver Fitzroy, RN.

October

At Malta.

26th – RODNEY and NELSON escorted by the destroyer OFFA sailed from Malta for the UK via Algiers.

29th - RODNEY and NELSON escorted by the destroyer OFFA sailed from Algiers for the UK. En route RODNEY again encountered her old steering problems she also had engine problems.

Off Gibraltar they were joined by the destroyers OBEDIENT, TEAZER, ROCKET and TARTAR from Gibraltar.

November

4th – West of Ireland RODNEY with destroyers TEAZER and ROCKET detached and steered for the Clyde.

5th – RODNEY with destroyers TEAZER and ROCKET arrived in the Clyde.

RODNEY's condition was now very poor and with the war expected to continue for several more years, plans were drawn up to modernise both RODNEY and NELSON; but constraints on shipbuilding/ship repair facilities and the need to concentrate on escort vessels meant the plan never materialised.

December

In the Clyde off Greenock.

7th - Embarked army officers for training as bombardment liaison officers. She then proceeded to the Clyde bombardment range and carried out a 6in shoot

17th – Arrived at Scapa from the Clyde.

29th – Sailed from Scapa to carry out exercises with the French battleship FS RICHELIEU. (The RICHELIEU had joined the Home Fleet at Scapa on 20/11/43)

1944

January

At Scapa Flow.

8th – Due to lack of maintenance, leaks in RODNEY's hull plating were letting in 1000 tons of water per hour and her pumps were struggling to keep up with the inflow. In an attempt to stop some of the leaks RODNEY was careened to port so that her ship's staff could work on some of the worst leaks.

11th – The work on the stopping the leaks had been unsuccessful and this resulted in RODNEY being declared unseaworthy.

16th – At 2100 hours RODNEY escorted by the destroyers ONSLAUGHT and ORWELL sailed from Scapa for Rosyth

17th – At 0900 hours RODNEY arrived at No 23 buoy off Rosyth for refit. ONSLAUGHT and ORWELL returned to Scapa.

The start of the refit was delayed, then it was cancelled, as Churchill had written to the First Sea Lord, Admiral of the Fleet Cunningham stating that he hoped that RODNEY would be part of the bombarding fleet for the Normandy invasion. The decision was then taken to carry out the minimum of work necessary to keep her in service.

February

Moored off Rosyth.

28th - Moved in to No 1 dry dock in Rosyth dockyard where her leaks were attended to and her torpedo tubes, aircraft and aircraft catapult etc removed.

March

At Rosyth undergoing repair.

31st – Sailed from Rosyth for Scapa.

April

1st – Arrived at Scapa to carry out working up exercises, which included intensive bombardment practice.

14th - Whilst carrying out a 16in shoot her steering motors failed

19th - Sailed from Scapa in the evening to carry out a 16in & 6in shoot against stack Skerry

22nd – Sailed from Scapa for the Clyde.

23rd – Arrived off Greenock.

26th – In company with the battleship RAMILLIES, Monitor EREBUS and US battleship TEXAS carried out a shore bombardment practice on the Clyde bombardment range.

May

1st – In the Clyde where she was hit by an experimental magnetic torpedo fired during development trials; no damage was caused.

For the next four days carried out a shore bombardment practice on the Clyde bombardment range.

3rd – Embarked 398 HE shells for her 16in guns, also embarked proximity fused AA shells

6th – At 1300 hours sailed from Greenock for Scapa.

7th – At 1400 hours RODNEY arrived at Scapa to carry out more exercises, including AA fire against glider bombs. A Miles Martinet trainer aircraft was used to simulate a glider bomb.

9th – RODNEY was visited by General Montgomery.

20th – RODNEY escorted by the destroyer METEOR sailed from Scapa to carry out exercises to test her defences against E-Boats.

At 2000 hours four more destroyers joined in the exercises.

At 2100 hours a simulated air attack was carried out by FAA Barracudas and RAF Spitfires followed by simulated glider bomb attacks.

21st – At 0100 hours a night simulated E-Boat attack was carried out on the Force.

The Force then returned to Scapa.

Later in the day RODNEY's CO, Captain Robert Oliver Fitzroy RN, left the ship and proceeded south to be briefed on Operation Neptune/Overlord.

26th – RODNEY sailed from Scapa in company with battleship HOWE escorted by the destroyers METEOR, WAKEFUL and WAGER for exercises and a 6in shoot.

27th – Sailed from Scapa for the Clyde.

28th – Arrived in the Clyde.

29th – RODNEY in company with battleships RAMILLIES and WARSPITE, cruisers FROBISHER, DANAE, DRAGON and MAURITIUS sailed for invasion exercises. The exercises included air attacks by RAF Beaufighters and simulated E-Boat attacks by motor launches.

30th – At 0400 hours a simulated invasion was carried out, the 'invasion force' was led by the 40th M/S Squadron and on the way into the beachhead further simulated air attacks were made on the force and barrage practice was carried out.

31st – The Force returned to Greenock.

June

3rd – At 1600 hours RODNEY, the cruiser SIRIUS, destroyer WESTCOTT and frigate RIOU sailed from Greenock and headed south to take part in Operation NEPTUNE/OVERLORD.

At 1900 hours RODNEY's CO addressed the ships company, informing them of the operation and telling them that RODNEY was to be a standby bombardment vessel for the Eastern Task Force.

4th – At 0800 hours RODNEY's group were in the St George's Channel, west of the Smalls light, when they received the signal postponing the invasion for 24 hours. The group turned around and steered north.

At 1500 hours when off Anglesey, they stopped their northerly movement and cruised off the island to await the order to resume their southerly course.

At 2200 hours they were ordered to resume their southerly movement.

5th – At 0700 hours when off Lands End, WESTCOTT detached to refuel and the destroyer BLEASDALE joined.

At 2100 hours RODNEY's group arrived in Spithead where they anchored to await orders.

6th – At 0230 hours RODNEY, SIRIUS, RIOU and BLEASDALE sailed for Sword Beach.

On arrival off the beachhead they were ordered to return to Spithead.

7th – At 0245 hours RODNEY, SIRIUS, RIOU and BLEASDALE sailed for the Normandy beachhead.

At 0930 hours they arrived off the American beachhead where they joined the US battleships ARKANSAS, TEXAS and NEVADA and the heavy cruiser TUSCALOOSA.

There were no targets for RODNEY in the American sector so the group sailed east to the British beaches.

At 1830 hours off Juno Beach RODNEY opened fire on the 12th SS Panzer Division "Hitlerjugend" who were driving the 9th Brigade, 3rd Canadian Division back from Authie, north west of Caen. RODNEY fired 132 rounds of 16in and 99 rounds of 6in.

(After this bombardment a German officer stated that the concentrated fire was such as had never been seen before on any European battlefield and officers and men were totally demoralised)

8th – At 0900 hours carried out a 6in shoot in support of the 3rd Canadian Division, against a fortified farm held by the 12th SS Panzer Division.

Late in the evening the Luftwaffe attacked shipping off the beachhead. In the attack RODNEY was near missed by 4 bombs.

9th – Between 0315 and 0335 hours RODNEY fired 78 rounds of 16in in support of the 185th Brigade of the British 3rd Division against the 21st SS Panzer Division.

Later RODNEY fired 75 rounds of 16in against tanks of the 21st SS Panzer Division near Caen. It should only have been 15 rounds, but the telegraphist who took the radio message wrote his 'ones' in the continental manner, ie like a seven, so an additional 60 rounds were fired.

At 0900 hours RODNEY carried out a 6in blind shoot against a German troop assembly area.

At 1100 hours RODNEY carried out a 6in shoot against German troops and vehicles near Caen. Followed by 7 rounds of 16in AP against the Benneville battery.

Later in the day RODNEY carried out a 6in shoot against the Houlgate battery (4 ex French 155mm guns).

At 1600 hours RODNEY came under air attack from 12 Me 109 and Fw 190 fighter bombers all the bombs missed.

At 1700 hours RODNEY, the cruiser DRAGON escorted by RIOU and BLEASDALE sailed from the beachhead for Milford Haven, where RODNEY was to re-ammunition.

10th – At 1500 hours RODNEY, RIOU and BLEASDALE arrived at Milford Haven.

Re-ammunitioned with 260 HE and 610 AP 16in shells and 2400 HE 6in shells. The 16in shells were the last available in the UK.

11th – At 1400 hours RODNEY, RIOU and BLEASDALE sailed from Milford Haven.

At 2100 hours RIOU attacked a sub contact and damaged her engines. RIOU detached to Plymouth

12th – At 0730 hours RODNEY and BLEASDALE arrived in Spithead.

On arrival BLEASDALE was withdrawn from operational duty for the removal of wire from her propeller shafting.

18th – RODNEY escorted by the destroyers SCOURGE, FURY and ALGONQUIN (ALGONQUIN had embarked General Crerar and 22 Staff Officers for passage to Assault Area) sailed from Spithead for the beachhead.

On arrival at the beachhead RODNEY anchored off Juno Beach.

19th – At 0100 hours the weather off the beaches started to deteriorate, the wind, blowing from the north easterly direction grew in intensity from force 4.

At 1800 hours the wind speed was force 5 with waves of 6½ feet. (All storm data is for Omaha Beach)

20th – At 0700 hours the wind speed was force 5 with waves of 7 feet.

At 1800 hours the wind speed was force 6 with waves of 7½ feet.

21st – At 0700 hours the wind speed was force 6 with waves of 7½ feet.

At 1800 hours the wind speed was force 5 with waves of 7 feet.

22nd – At 0700 hours the wind speed was force 4 with waves of 5½ feet.

23rd – At 2330 hours RODNEY was subjected to an attempted dive bombing attack by a Ju 88, but the attacker was driven off by intensive AA fire.

24th – From 0015 hours through the hours of darkness RODNEY was subjected to air attack. No hits were scored.

26th – At 0800 hours RODNEY in company with the monitor ROBERTS and light cruisers ARGONAUT, BELFAST and DIADEM carried out a shoot in support of Operation EPSOM, the British VIII Corps, 15th Scottish Division leading, advance into the Odon Valley. Their target was the 1st, 9th and 12th SS Panzer Divisions. Immediately afterwards RODNEY fired 10 rounds of 16in at Carpiquet airfield which was to east of the line of advance of VIII corps; the target was the 12th SS Panzer Division.

At 1230 hours RODNEY fired a further 10 rounds of 16in at Carpiquet airfield.

29th - Intelligence reported that an E-Boat attack is to be made on RODNEY. To counter the threat 37 LCT's were positioned around RODNEY.

30th – At 1400 hours RODNEY was off Gold Beach when she carried out a one hour shoot firing 16in shells into the village of Gavrus in support of the 15th Scottish Division who had earlier been forced out of Gavrus by 1st SS Panzer Division. RODNEY's bombardment had a devastating effect on enemy morale.

July

3rd – At 0500 hours RODNEY carried out a 16in shoot on Carpiquet airfield in support of the Canadian 8th Brigade, Operation WINDSOR. RODNEY's target was the 12th SS Panzer Division.

4th – RODNEY was visited by General Montgomery, Vice Admiral Dalrymple-Hamilton and Rear Admiral Rivett-Carnac.

5th – RODNEY was visited by officers from the Guards Brigade.

6th - Intelligence reported that an attack on shipping off the invasion beaches was to be made by human torpedoes and midget submarines.

At 1900 hours RODNEY carried out a shoot on buildings in Le Havre docks that were thought to be the base for the human torpedoes and midget submarines.

7th – RODNEY fired 46 rounds of 16in against Hill 112, which is 6¼ miles south west of Caen. The barrage was to soften up the 9th SS Panzer Division who held Hill 112 in preparation for Operation JUPITER the attack by the 129th Brigade of the 43rd Wessex Division the following day to seize Hill 112. (Hill 112 had changed hands several times during the past two weeks and the Germans said; He who controls Hill 112 controls Normandy)

8th – At 0800 hours RODNEY carried out a 16in shoot against the assembly areas of the 12th SS Panzer Division and the 16th Luftwaffe Field Division in support of the British 1st Corps assault on Caen, Operation CHARNWOOD.

9th – At 0200 hours the Luftwaffe mounted an attack by 150 aircraft on shipping off the beachhead.

At 0845 hours RODNEY fired 15 rounds of 16in at German tanks of the 12th SS Panzer Division in support of Operation CHARNWOOD. One of RODNEY's 16in shells destroyed the spire of the Church of Saint-Pierre in Caen.

At 1400 hours Sailed from the beachhead for Spithead. During her period off the beachhead RODNEY had fired 519 x 16in, 454 x 6in and 1200 x 4.7in.

At 2200 hours arrived in Spithead.

RODNEY's crew were heartened to hear a BBC news bulletin attribute all their success to NELSON!

15th – At 0430 hours RODNEY escorted by a frigate and two sloops sailed from Spithead for Plymouth.

At 1400 hours arrived in Plymouth Sound and then proceeded to dock in Devonport.

August

At Devonport.

10th - At 1300 hours RODNEY escorted by the destroyers FAULKNOR and the HNorMS STORD sailed from Plymouth for Portland.

At 1900 hours RODNEY, FAULKNOR and STORD arrived at Portland.

11th – At 0645 hours RODNEY escorted by the destroyers FAULKNOR, STORD and URANIA sailed from Portland to carry out a bombardment of coastal gun emplacements on Alderney.
In the channel STORD and URANIA detached and the destroyer SAUMAREZ from Portsmouth joined.
At 0910 hours on arrival off Cherbourg the weather was unsuitable for the shoot so RODNEY, FAULKNOR and SAUMAREZ returned to Portland.
At 1200 hours RODNEY, FAULKNOR and SAUMAREZ arrived back at Portland.

12th – At 0730 hours RODNEY escorted by the destroyers FAULKNOR and JERVIS sailed from Portland to carry out a bombardment of coastal gun emplacements on Alderney.
At 1215 hours RODNEY arrived off Cherbourg and with the assistance of a US tug from Cherbourg RODNEY was manoeuvred into position at 90¼ to the east about 20 miles from and broadside to Alderney.
At 1410 hours RODNEY opened fire on the Blucher Battery of four guns on Alderney, spotting was carried out by a RAF Spitfire from 26 Sqd. Great accuracy was required due to the nearby British civilian population. (This was the first time a battleship had fired on Crown territory).
At 1642 hours after firing 75 x 16in shells, 40 of which fell very close to the battery, RODNEY ceased fire. The spotting aircraft reported that the shoot had achieved the destruction of 3 of the 4 guns. However subsequently this was found not to be so.
At 1700 hours RODNEY, FAULKNOR and JERVIS set sail for Portland.
At 2230 hours RODNEY escorted by the destroyers FAULKNOR and JERVIS arrived at Portland.

27th – At 0545 hours RODNEY escorted by two destroyers and a sloop sailed from Portland for Plymouth.
At 1330 hours arrived at Plymouth.

29th – Rodney moved into the No 5 basin of Devonport dockyard for urgent maintenance.

September

Under repair at Devonport

12th – RODNEY sailed from Plymouth for Scapa.

14th – RODNEY arrived at Scapa and joined the Home Fleet. On arrival at Scapa RODNEY embarked a quantity of AP 16in shells. These were necessary as her next roll was to protect a Russian convoy against the possible intervention by the German battleship TIRPITZ.

16th – At 1300 hours RODNEY, escort carriers CAMPANIA (Flag C1, Rear Admiral McGrigor) and STRIKER light cruiser DIADEM and destroyers MYNGS (D26), VERULAM, SAVAGE, ZAMBESI, HMCS ALGONQUIN and HNorMS STORD sailed from Scapa for Operation RIGMAROLE. (Operation RIGMAROLE was the operational name for the Russian convoy JW 60).

(What was not known at the time of sailing was that the RAF had carried out Operation PARAVANE, a bomb attack on the TIRPITZ. At 0630 hours GMT on 15/9/44, 27 Lancasters, 10 from No 9 Sqd and 17 from 617 Sqd. Took off from Yagodnik airfield in northern Russia to bomb the TIRPITZ lying in Altenfjord. 21 aircraft carried the 12,000lb Tallboy bomb, 4 carried the 500 lb JW 'walking mine' and 2 carried 'special bombs'. The attack on TIRPITZ took place at 1100 hours GMT, by the time the force arrived over the target TIRPITZ was completely hidden by a smoke screen. However despite the smoke screen TIRPITZ was hit by one Tallboy bomb [explosive 5200 Lb of Torpex] on her foredeck, the bomb passed through her hull and exploded off her starboard bow almost blowing her bows off. The damage effectively put TIRPITZ out of action for at least nine months. However naval intelligence did not learn of the true extent of the damage for several weeks)

At 1800 hours RODNEY carried out a 16in shoot on the Cape Wrath range.
At 2100 hours proceeded to RV with convoy JW 60. (JW 60 had sailed from Loch Ewe at 0800/15/9/44)

17th – At 0500 hours in approximate position 60N, 8W RODNEY, CAMPANIA, STRIKER, DIADEM and destroyers MYNGS, VERULAM, SAVAGE, ZAMBESI, ALGONQUIN and STORD, RVed with convoy JW 60. At same time The destroyer HMCS SIOUX joined from Scapa.
The convoy comprised 30 merchant ships a rescue ship with close escort of the 7th Escort Group comprising destroyers BULLDOG, KEPPEL and WHITEHALL, the sloop CYGNET and the corvettes ALLINGTON CASTLE and BAMBOROUGH CASTLE. The destroyers MILNE (D3), MUSKETEER, MARNE and METEOR who had been with the convoy from Loch Ewe. Also with the convoy were the destroyers SAUMAREZ (D23), SCORPION, VOLAGE and VENUS who had joined JW 60 in approximate position 58-45N, 6W.

Following the RV with the convoy the destroyers MYNGS, VERULAM, SAVAGE, ZAMBESI, ALGONQUIN and STORD detached and returned to Scapa.

At 0600 hours the convoy was joined by the destroyers VIRAGO, VERULAM and HMCS ALGONQUIN from Loch Ewe.

At 0600 hours RODNEY took up station in the centre of the convoy with a close escort of the destroyers MILNE, MARNE and METEOR and MUSKETEER. The two escort carriers took up position astern of the convoy which then proceeded at 9.5 knots.

At 1540 hours RODNEY's captain informed the crew that their mission was to deter the TIRPITZ.

23rd - Convoy JW 60 arrived at Kola Inlet.

On arrival the flag of CS1 was transferred from the CAMPANIA to RODNEY.

26th – RODNEY was visited by Russian admiral Golovko

28th - The flag of CS1 was transferred from RODNEY back to the CAMPANIA.

Convoy RA 60 comprising 30 merchant ships a rescue ship with close escort of the 7th Escort Group comprising destroyers BULLDOG, KEPPLER and WHITEHALL, the sloop CYGNET and the corvettes ALLINGTON CASTLE and BAMBOROUGH CASTLE sailed from Kola Inlet.

Off Kola Inlet convoy RA 60 was joined by the ocean escort of RODNEY, CAMPANIA, STRIKER, DIADEM and destroyers MILNE (D3), MUSKETEER, MARNE, METEOR, SAUMAREZ (D23), SCORPION, VOLAGE, VENUS, VIRAGO, VERULAM and HMCS ALGONQUIN and SIOUX.

29th – At 1630 hours in approximate position 73N, 24E the Liberty ships SS EDWARD H CROCKET 7,176 grt with 1659 tons of chrome ore as ballast and SS SAMSUVA 7,219 grt with 3000 tons of pit props were torpedoed and seriously damaged by submarine U 310.

The EDWARD H CROCKET was sunk by gunfire by the destroyer MILNE.

The SAMSUVA was sunk by the destroyers BULLDOG and MUSKETEER.

October

4th – RODNEY, CAMPANIA, STRIKER, DIADEM and destroyers MILNE (D3), MUSKETEER, MARNE, METEOR, SAUMAREZ (D23), SCORPION, VENUS, VERULAM, VIRAGO, VOLAGE and HMCS ALGONQUIN and SIOUX arrived at Scapa.

5th – RODNEY hoisted the Flag of Admiral Sir Henry Moore the CinC Home Fleet.

11th – The flag of CinC home Fleet transferred from RODNEY to FURIOUS.

13th – At 1200 hours RODNEY escorted by destroyers CAPRICE and VENUS sailed from Scapa for Rosyth.

14th – At 0100 hours RODNEY and destroyers CAPRICE and VENUS arrived at Rosyth. The destroyers then returned to Scapa.

RODNEY was docked for maintenance.

27th – At 0500 hours RODNEY sailed from Rosyth.

Off May Island RODNEY RVED with the destroyer HMCS IROQUOIS who then escorted her to Scapa.

At 1700 hours RODNEY and IROQUOIS arrived at Scapa.

30th - RODNEY hoisted the Flag of Admiral Sir Henry Moore the CinC Home Fleet.

November

4th – RODNEY in company with light cruiser EURYALUS sailed from Scapa for a practice shoot off Cape Wrath. RODNEY acted as a target for EURYALUS

22nd – Flag of Admiral Sir Henry Moore the CinC Home Fleet transferred to IMPLACABLE

29th - RODNEY hoisted the Flag of Admiral Sir Henry Moore the CinC Home Fleet.

December

At Scapa flying the Flag of Admiral Sir Henry Moore the CinC Home Fleet.

1945**January to April**

At Scapa flying the Flag of Admiral Sir Henry Moore the CinC Home Fleet.

May

At Scapa flying the Flag of Admiral Sir Henry Moore the CinC Home Fleet.

11th – At Scapa where she was visited by Mr A V Alexander the first lord of the Admiralty.

22nd – Flag of Admiral Sir Henry Moore the CinC Home Fleet was hauled down. RODNEY then sailed for Rosyth.

23rd – RODNEY arrived at Rosyth.

June to August

At Rosyth.

Post War Notes

HMS RODNEY was honoured by a Royal visit on 29th September 1945, before she paid off at Portsmouth on 30th November that year. The ship was laid-up in Reserve at Rosyth and placed on the Disposal List in March 1948. Sold to BISCO for demolition by TW Ward she arrived in tow at Inverkeithing to be broken-up on 26th March 1948.

Addendum

CONVOY ESCORT MOVEMENTS of HMS RODNEY
by Don Kindell

These convoy lists have not been cross-checked with the text above

Date convoy sailed	Joined convoy as escort	Convoy No.	Left convoy	Date convoy arrived
09/11/40	12/11/40	SC 011	15/11/40	26/11/40
11/11/40	17/11/40	HX 085/1	21/11/40	25/11/40
03/12/40	11/12/40	HX 093	13/12/40	18/12/40
09/02/41	18/02/41	HX 108	20/02/41	27/02/41
11/03/41	unknown	HX 114	unknown	30/03/41
10/04/41	10/04/41	TC 010	19/04/41	19/04/41
24/09/41	24/09/41	HALBERD	27/09/41	27/09/41
15/09/44	17/09/44	JW 060	23/09/44	23/09/44
28/09/44	28/09/44	RA 060	03/10/44	05/10/44

(Note on Convoys)

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